PARTISAN REVIEW

A Bi-Monthly of Revolutionary Literature
Published by the John Reed Club of New York

VOLUME II, No. 7 APRIL-MAY, 1935

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PARTISAN REVIEW NO. 7

For the purpose of presenting a united creative front on the eve of the first Congress of American Writers, this issue combines the 7th number of *Partisan Review* and the 4th number of *Dynamo*.

We are publishing in this issue a discussion of some of the literary problems which face writers today and which will be further considered at the Writers Congress. The discussion takes the form of three leading articles—on the novel, criticism, and poetry—each followed by a number of comments. None of the articles and comments necessarily represents the editorial opinion of *Partisan Review*, nor are they to be taken as programmatic statements.

New Contributors:

NEWTON ARVIN is the author of a biography of Hawthorne and was a recipient of a Guggenheim award this year.

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FORWARD TO THE GREAT ALLIANCE

THE AMERICAN WRITERS CONGRESS CONVENES

THE FIRST CONGRESS OF AMERICAN WRITERS, opening on April 26th in New York City, will be a memorable event in American culture and American life. From all parts of the country writers of varying backgrounds and reputations—all responsive to the necessity of combating reaction, fascism and war—will come together to consider the economic, political and literary problems facing the writer today. This Congress will accelerate the secession of American intellectuals from the apologetics and chaos which capitalism nurtures in culture, and will set the frame for a more profound and more extensive revolutionary literature. It will be a stirring political demonstration of the great battle-alliance of intellectuals and the exploited masses against fascism and war.

The editors of *Partisan Review* greet the American Writers Congress and look forward to the esthetic and political clarity which will undoubtedly emerge from the Congress. We have devoted a large part of this issue to a discussion of some of the literary problems confronting revolutionary writers. At the Congress itself, a more intensive and more authoritative discussion of these problems will take place. In addition, the methods of effective organized political action, the general relation of literature to society, the improvement of the revolutionary press and the widening of the distribution of revolutionary books, among other related questions, will be considered.

Delegates from other countries in the Americas and from European countries will bring to the Congress their revolutionary experience. Foremost as a source of revolutionary tradition looms the Soviet Union, with its gigantic cultural and economic achievements in the sphere of socialist construction, its consistent

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struggle for world peace, and the hope it holds for the liberation of humanity.

We expect that out of this Congress will come the formation of the League of American Writers, affiliated with the International Union of Revolutionary Writers. Such an organization, we believe, will not only strengthen the anti-capitalist front but will also advance the growth of a radical and revolutionary literature.

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WHAT IS A PROLETARIAN NOVEL?

Notes Toward A Definition

Edwin Seaver

IT IS NOT NECESSARILY A NOVEL written by a worker, about workers or for workers. We have only to think of a "worker" like Matthew Woll writing a novel about patriotic workers for the average walking-delegate-minded A. F. of L. member to arrive at a conception that is the complete parody of the proletarian novel. On the other hand, it is possible for an author of middleclass origin to write a novel about petty-bourgeois characters which will appeal primarily to readers of the same class, and yet such a work can come within the classification, Proletarian Novel. Thus Albert Halper's *The Foundry,* although altogether about workers, does not seem to us to be a genuine proletarian novel, while Josephine Herbst's *The Executioner Waits,* which deals primarily with middleclass folk, most certainly does. Obviously everything depends upon what we mean by workers in a *scene* that has been, and to a large extent still is, saturated with the middleclass ideology. Everything depends upon what we mean by petty-bourgeois in a *time* when the rapid proletarianization of considerable sections of the lower middleclass necessitates a corresponding change in our topography of the classes.

• • •

Some critics are of the opinion that the term Proletarian Literature cannot be satisfactorily defined and that all discussions based on this term are therefore a priori doomed to futility. These same critics are also generally of the opinion that the word Proletariat is "un-American" and that, since it cannot be naturalized or at least does not readily lend itself to naturalization, it ought to be dropped in favor, let us say, of a simple American word like Workers. About this business of "un-American," it is perhaps sufficient to point out that a number of words which a decade ago seemed to be the exclusive property of the Communist Party may be seen today walking around in their bed-slippers on the front page of the *New York Times.* All this, however, is aside from the point. What these critics fail to see is that Proletariat and Workers are by no means synonymous—especially in terms of the American scene—and that in our

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failure to distinguish between the two may lie the primary obstacle to an acceptable definition of Proletarian Literature.

* * *

While of course all members of the proletariat are workers or potential workers, the reverse does not necessarily hold true. By proletariat we mean the property-less class, the exploited; we mean literally those who have nothing to lose but their chains. Now it is plain that certain elements among the American workingclass, at least up to the time of the crisis, were not members of the proletariat in the ideological sense that we are using the term. On the other hand, it is equally plain that today large sections of the lower middleclass very definitely may be said to belong to the proletariat. The growth of the proletarian novel in the United Stataes can be measured accurately by the growth of the American proletariat and the growing recognition among our writers of the existence and historical significance of this proletariat.

* * *

Without an understanding of the principles of Marxism, without the existence of the Communist Party as the embodiment of these principles in action, such recognition on the part of our novelists could never have been so readily translated into terms of experience. Of course, the principles of Marxism were there before the crisis, as was the Communist Party. But for the novelist these principles, this action, had to be made manifest in terms of the American masses and the writer's immediate environment before they could be of real value to him in his work as a creator. And this is precisely what has happened during the crisis. The novelist, seeking to write truthfully about a new and bewildering set-up, could turn to Marxism for the key and, studying Marxism, could turn to the American scene for confirmation. It was only then that he was in a position to shed the sense of aimless flux, the despair, cynicism and nihilism of the previous decade and substitute in their stead a new purpose, a new orientation and a sweeping historical perspective. At the same time, the bourgeois conception of the novelist as bystander or spectator was also exploded, and the writer came to see himself not as bystander but as participant. Finally, he came to see society not as a static picture, as something which existed, but as something dynamic, something in the process of dying and in the process of being born.

* * *

All this, of course, is extremely sketchy, no more than a suggestion or two, and on the whole valueless unless we take cognizance of the fact that the novelist has not suffered an ideological sea-change through any sudden burst of vision, but through a painful realization not only that the

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class struggle exists, but of his own position in that struggle. In general, men are not moved so much by what happens to other men as by what happens to themselves, and the assault on the living standard of the writer and his brother professionals, as well as the shrinking of his economic horizon have been most instructive. There has also been the living example, over a period of years, of writers under fascism and under socialism. Other contributory factors could be mentioned, but we are not concerned here so much with what makes a proletarian novelist as what makes a proletarian novel. It seems plain, however, that it is not the class origin of the novelist that matters but his present class alignment, not the period of history in which he sets his story, or the kind of characters he writes about, but his ideological approach to his story and characters, which approach is entirely conditioned by his acceptance of the Marxian interpretation of history. And not only acceptance, but the use of this interpretation as a compelling factor in his work.

* * *

If we were to look back to the time of the French revolution we should find critics using consciously and belligerently the term Bourgeois Literature, in contradistinction to the expiring feudalistic literature, just as we now use the term Proletarian Literature in contradistinction to the literature of the dying bourgeoisie. A century later, however, when the gains of the French Revolution were already long established and the bourgeoisie firmly in the saddle, critics no longer used the term Bourgeois Literature. Novelists and critics alike moved freely in a generally accepted body of ideas. It is only today, as capitalism draws toward its close, that the term has come to be used again, as negatively as it was once used positively, and alongside the new term Proletarian Literature. The inference would seem to be that such terms as Bourgeois Literature or Proletarian Literature are what might be called *beginning and end terms.* They are used only when the ideological superstructure and the economic base have not become either entirely united or entirely dis-united. They represent the same struggle being conducted on the cultural front, and at the same time, as the struggle on the economic front.

* * *

These critics who conceive the problems of proletarian literature in the U. S. and the U.S.S.R. as essentially the same err seriously. The proletarian novelist in the U. S. is, at least in part, destructive in his work; *i.e.,* he aims to destroy the existent remnants of capitalist society; he is a revolutionist. The Soviet novelist, on the other hand, aims to conserve the victories of the Revolution and to build constructively upon this foundation. There can be a unity in the Soviet novel that is difficult, if not impossible, to attain in the con-

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temporary American novel. In accordance with the proposition stated above, concerning beginning and end terms, we should not expect Soviet novelists to be talking very much any more about proletarian literature. And this is true. They talk today about Soviet literature, about the literature of the socialist fatherland, about the problems of socialist realism and the like. Proletarian literature is not something they are working toward; it is something which exists, and they do not have to talk about it precisely because they have it. Proletarian Literature in the U.S.S.R. is the uncontested literature of a victorious and firmly established socialist society. Proletarian literature in the U. S., on the other hand, has its roots in the future; it must deal not only with present reality but with reality still in the process of becoming. If it does not deal with the latter it cannot be proletarian literature. But if it neglects the former, it cannot be literature at all.

* * *

To sum up then: the proletarian novel in the U. S., in the present stage of revolutionary crisis, cannot be defined in terms of aesthetics, or in terms of characters or subject matter. It can be defined only in terms of history and of political philosophy: the materialist dialectic, recognition of the class struggle, acceptance of the historic role of the proletariat in the formation of a new and socialist society. It is not only the class alignment of the novelist that must be considered, not only his acceptance and use of the Marxian interpretation in his work, but the revolutionary purpose of his work, his aim not merely to understand the world and not merely to explain it, but to change it. Without the presence of all these elements in a given work, it seems to me, we cannot have a genuine proletarian novel.

DISCUSSION

Edwin Berry Burgum:

The proletarian novel is a novel written under the influence of dialectic materialism from the point of view of the class-conscious proletariat.

The bourgeois novel is either (1) a novel of escape written under the influence of idealistic philosophy or (2) a novel of despondency written under the influence of pragmatism or (3) a novel combining elements of both. An example of the first is Thornton Wilder's *Bridge of San Luis Rey,* of the second William Faulkner's *Sanctuary,* and of the third Thomas Wolfe's *Of Time and the River.* These three types exist in time: *i.e.*

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the first tends to be supplemented by the second, and the third reflects the rise of fascism: *i.e.,* in the third type certain aspects of contemporary society are recognized with disgust and then distorted by the optimism of an idealistic (Nietzschean) interpretation.

Insofar as the bourgeois novel is concerned with the proletariat, it is pessimistic: insofar as the proletarian novel is concerned with the bourgeoisie, it is pessimistic; but though the bourgeois novel may be pessimistic about the bourgeoisie, the proletarian novel is never pessimistic about the class-conscious proletariat. This is by reason of the fact that both by observation of American life and by Marxist theory the proletariat is defined as class-conscious when it acts in the belief that only its conscious cooperation is necessary to promote the immediate direction of history towards the dictatorship of the proletariat. Therefore at the present moment in American history the proletarian is synonymous with the revolutionary novel: *i.e.,* the revolutionary novel is the proletarian novel considered from its political rather than its social or its æsthetic aspect.

But I agree with Edwin Seaver that the proletarian novel is not necessarily and is not at the present moment usually a novel for the proletariat or by the proletariat. In some cases it may not even be chiefly of the proletariat. (The distinctions made so far are not æsthetic, and therefore apply equally to other forms of literature than the novel: *i.e.,* a disturbing example of the third category is the poetic drama *Panic,* which is written primarily about bankers, by a man who has had almost no proletarian contacts, and for an audience that is not proletarian, but which is nevertheless closer to our definition of proletarian art than to that of bourgeois).

We must consider at this point some disconcerting facts. Historically the novel is the chief bourgeois contribution to literary forms. It arose with the rise of the bourgeoisie (as the bourgeoisie rose with the rise of capitalism), and it has flourished with their flourishing. At present the greatest European works of literature are bourgeois novels: Mann, Proust, Joyce, Gide; but they are all novels of the second bourgeois type, cynical. In fact there have been few great bourgeois novelists who have failed either to satirize or to escape from their class. Stendhal and Balzac are examples of the former; Hardy and James of the latter (the first sought to take refuge in the peasantry, the second in an aristocracy).

At the present time, the proletarian novel is usually not read by the proletarian, whether class-conscious or not, and it is seldom written by a proletarian. We must remember that at present a class-conscious proletarian may not be either a science-conscious or an art-conscious proletarian, though he will invariably be groping in these directions in proportion as he has the time and the training. A "novel" by a proletarian tends now

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to be not a novel (when it is good work) but reportage, the diary, the sketch: *i.e.,* it is commendably true to experience but lacks that selective ordering of experience under the control of a dominating social point of view which is the primary condition of form in literature.

At present, the proletarian novel at its best represents that region of American life where the skilled worker merges with the petty bourgeoisie: *i.e.,* where the worker has once had a bourgeois education and a bourgeois point of view and where the petty bourgeois is coming to discard his bourgeois education and point of view. The line of distinction, therefore, is delicate between two such masterly novels as Cantwell's *Land of Plenty* (in which the skilled worker is becoming conscious of his power) and Herbst's *The Executioner Waits,* in which the petty bourgeois is becoming conscious of his belonging with the proletariat.

At the present moment, therefore, the proletarian novels that have received the most praise are novels "from the point of view" of the class-conscious proletariat, but are actually written by and for the petty bourgeoisie who have achieved or are achieving this point of view under the pressure of events.

But this definition of the proletarian novel purports to be dialectic in part since it represents a direction rather than sets up a norm. As events change we may expect a change in emphasis: *i.e.,* a continued shift of focal interest more and more upon the proletariat itself. MacLeish's *Panic* could not have been written five years ago and we may predict that nothing like it can possibly appear two years hence. We may predict also that Miss Herbst will in future novels shift her focus from the middle bourgeois members of the family she is treating towards the problems and interests of its simon pure proletarians.

At the same time a reciprocal activity will take place within the proletariat itself. As the proletarian grows in understanding of himself he will become more interested in the novel both as reader and as writer, and proletarians as a class will cease to be themselves in the old sense. For the term "class-conscious proletariat" itself represents not an absolute norm but one whose very nature tends to be transformed under the influence of the direction it follows in the progress of history.

With this change in emphasis will come changes in the technique of writing either (1) away from the great bourgeois styles, such as the stream of consciousness or (2) towards a new utilization of them which will make them under the new emphasis the more communicative and the more self-consistent or (3) (as I think the more probable) first in the first direction and later in the second.

At the present time the influence of Marxism is greater upon the form of the proletarian novel than upon its style.

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The proletarian novel must take cognizance of the conflicts between bourgeoisie and proletariat since this cognizance furnishes the essential and inevitable means by which the proletariat grows in self-consciousness (which is identical with class-consciousness). This necessary attitude towards the subject-matter implies a dialectic transformation of the two traditional conceptions of literary form, the classical and the romantic. If the classical is the survival of the materialistic absolute of Aristotle and the romantic that of the idealistic absolute of transcendental philosophy, if the one is in consequence a so-called "closed" form, and the other an "open": the Marxian form of proletarian fiction so accepts and opposes both as to transform them into a third, which is the reflection in fiction of the dialectic materialistic conception of history. For example, the "closed" aspect of Malraux' *Man's Fate* is that the Chinese uprising is betrayed, that of Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread,* that the textile strike is lost; but in both these novels the conflict of events is so described and the novels leave the conflicts in such a state at the conclusion, that we sense the opposition of an "open" form: *i.e.,* we sense the fact that the whole novel is only an episode in a conflict to be continued in time, but a conflict to be continued definitely in a certain direction, to a certain outcome, to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This "open" form, however, is not "open" in the romantic sense since the direction is established, and is not into a world of absolute ideas but rather into a new stage in the materialistic development of history. This fact determines the note of belief and optimism which must define the conclusion of the proletarian novel.

Therefore, every proletarian novel craves its sequel. Every proletarian novel is an historical novel, but one which recognizes that we can know only the history of our own times and never with sufficient intimacy for the purpose of fiction either the distant past or the distant future. It represents the span of experience of its author and of his age seen thru the philosophy of dialectic materialism at a peculiar moment in the progress of history.

Henry Hart:

Seaver's remarks on the proletarian novel are apposite and true: they are stated with great simplicity and clarity, and they are indisputable. They contain, however, one contradiction which I am sure he would have resolved had he written at greater length.

He defines the proletariat as those who "literally have nothing to lose but their chains," and a proletarian novel as one which deals with this

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class. So far so good. Later on he bespeaks the truism that the American writer is a revolutionist, in that he aims to destroy "the existent remains of capitalism."

Now the latter purpose may be assisted by a novel which does not deal primarily with the proletariat, although it is difficult (but not inconceivable or impossible) to see how any novel can be written today which does not include some aspect of the life of the property-less, and the exploited. But, in effect and in practise, I think two terms are needed. I do not think "proletarian" and "revolutionary" are synonymous adjectives when applied to literature. Or to anything else, for that matter.

It can be argued, I suppose, that, inasmuch as the proletariat is the bulwark of the revolutionary movement, anything which contributes to its sustenance and increase, and to the success of the cause of which it is the chief support, is pro-proletarian. It can't be denied. But Seaver was dealing with definitions, and dealing with them very expertly. Therefore, I think it would improve the current critical nomenclature if the word "proletarian" were reserved for those novels which are concerned primarily with the life and problems of the proletariat, and the word "revolutionary" for those novels which do not primarily deal with the proletariat but which contribute to the destruction of capitalism.

All this sounds like just so much hair-splitting. But the proletariat is a class now expanding at such an accelerated velocity as to ensure the absorption of practically everybody except the last of the plutocrats. Thus it will soon be a term without a distinction. It will denote a *genre,* in the end, without any revolutionary implications (like those it now connotes). Indeed, as Seaver points out by his allusion to the present-day Soviet novelist, the proletarian novel of the future will decidedly be non-revolutionary.

It is usually taken for granted today that any proletarian novel (in Seaver's and the accepted sense) is *ipso facto* a revolutionary novel. This is more often true than not. But it is easily possible to unscramble the Siamese association of these two adjectives, and to classify novels as proletarian *and* revolutionary, proletarian *but not* revolutionary, proletarian and *anti*-revolutionary, and the same permutations and combinations on the word revolutionary.

I seem now to have befogged the issue Seaver set out to clarify, and *did* clarify. In messing it up again I had only the best of intentions. It was to make explicit this fact: that the acceptance of the Marxian interpretation of history should and must also be utilized in novels not primarily proletarian.

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James T. Farrell:

My personal opinion is that too much of revolutionary criticism, both theoretical articles and specific literary criticisms, is tending toward the creation of a kind of revolutionary scholasticism that can only breed sterility. Again and again, I have read pieces of revolutionary criticism where the writer approaches his subject from the outside, with no apparent realization that literature is a process, and that if it be understood, one must get inside the process, use the knowledge of literary traditions and the manner in which they have developed. Instead of approaching their material in this manner, our critics sometimes just stay on the outside, look in through the window, and then build their own theories and estimations. The general procedure seems to me to be something of the following. Marxian thought in general, and the conception of the class struggle in particular, is used as source for first premises. Then these premises are developed by a simple process of logical extension into an adequate generalized conclusion. The conclusion is then pasted onto the subject of literature, without any testing of it in terms of literary developments and traditions.

This kind of revolutionary scholasticism has led critics again and again into a self indulgence that is often merely a gratuitous exercise of their typewriters and their minds. Thus they have had their periods when they have discussed the question, what subjects can the proletarian writer use in his work, and then have listed these subjects. Or again they have issued calls that America develop its Maxim Gorky. Or they have made their predictions that in the future, there will be proletarian Prousts greater than Proust. And they have shown an extreme consciousness of categories, particularly the categories of bouegrois and proletarian. Often, however, they had not made clear what is the meaning of these categories, and how are they using them. Are they, for instance, merely descriptive categories to describe types or classifications of books, or are they standards? And after categories are established, there is that second task. Finding out what a certain book is, bourgeois, revolutionary, proletarian, or what? They neglect, in these exercises, a simple if taultolgous factor. That books make the categories. That books make literature and that to establish literary theories, and deal in literary criticism, one must understand books, understand the process whereby literary traditions develop, and make an effort to apprehend the relationship between literary developments and the social backgrounds and historical traditions out of which they develop.

It is frequently in dealing with the relationship between culture and what Marx termed the material relationships in a society, that our critics

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reveal a crass determinism. Thus they seem to treat this complex network of relationships as if it were a simple algebraic equation with a proper and easily mastered formula for its solution. They make the relationship between culture and economics direct and immediate, and this is an inadequate assumption, and it is foreign to the thought of Marx, as I understand Marx's writings. In fact, Marx, in his final note in *A Treatise on Political Economy,* states the precise opposite. In substance he states that it is a well known fact that in periods of highest development in art, there is not a direct relationship between art and the material relationships in a society, and cites Greek art as an example.

It is both easy and dangerous to draw unwarranted implications from Marx's writings. Thus when Marx and Engels emphasized economic factors as they did, they did not do so, to exclude other factors that influence social processes, ideals and culture for instance. And so, their writings must be taken in relationship to their purposes. Thus, they both wrote at a time when the tradition of philosophical dualism was a powerful intellectual current in Germany. German philosophers were concerned with such questions as what is the ground of the universe and in answering it in long and heavy tomes that would torture the eyesight and brains of future generations of students. And the answer was spirit. And spirit meant an extra-experiential force, or in other words, a new word for the old conception of God. An implication of this doctrine of philosophical dualism is that spirit is the motive force in the universe. Marx's materialism was a revolt from this doctrine, and rather than indulge in gratuitous descriptions of what causes social processes to work, he investigated the material world. He discovered that a basic and preponderantly influential one was economic relationships. And since he was writing at a time when dualism still held the day, it was necessary to make his emphasis on economics extremely strong. By so doing, he did not mean that economics was a sole factor. For he conceived societies as in process, and he perceived that there is ever present the factor of changes in social relationships. And because there is this factor of change, the effects of one set of relationships become the causes of the next set, and there is ever evolving a whole network of influences. So that cultural manifestations which are directly related to the basic material conditions upon which a society is founded in one era, evolve away from that set of relationships as the process unfolds in the passage of time, and they in turn become causal factors in the general stream of social tendencies and forces.

This being the case, a number of the statements in revolutionary criticism are, to say the least, unwarranted.

Earlier in this paper, I have made a reference to critics indulging themselves in manifestoes asking for an American Maxim Gorky, or in

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predictions stating that on some future date, there will be a proletarian Proust greater than Proust. The reason I made this slighting reference is that I feel while they are concerning themselves with such matters, they are often neglecting to perform as adequately as it might be performed, the function of a critic in furthering literary development. And that function is twofold, interpretation and evaluation. And in order to interpret and to evaluate, a critic must first seek to understand. And to understand, he cannot come to his work with his knowledge beforehand, his principles and standards settled like iron, and then merely to lump them over a work. Rather, he must come to it with flexible principles, and standards. And he must first seek to understand what an author is trying to do, and how well he does it. Then he can evaluate, and by evaluation I mean here, criticism of a writer's purposes, and an estimation of the essential meanings and implications of any work. But to be frank, I must state in conclusion, that the revolutionary critical work which I have read has too often not successfully performed such a task.

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CRITICISM

Wallace Phelps and Philip Rahv

The function of Maxian criticism has been defined as the relating of the problems of art and literature to the body of Marxian theory and to the daily events which it illuminates. Consequently this criticism covers a wide range: at one end there is the day by day practical evaluation of trends and individual works; at the other the elaboration of general esthetic principles in relation to the history of literature as a whole. The latter function finds its concrete application in the former, although the general principles are constantly tested, modified and enriched by current literary practice. Hence this division of functions is relative, and often one of emphasis.

It is difficult to have a consistent and accurate practical criticism when it is not based on a considerable body of esthetic theory. And this is one of the reasons why so many Marxian essays and reviews are given over to empirical observations, inverted estheticism, vulgar applications of political ideas to literature, and a host of obvious truths that are defended with great gusto. Such essays and reviews distort the function of criticism by isolating the political equivalents of books from their total contexts, and by judging these equivalents chiefly on the basis of immediate tactics. Another cause of this condition is the fact that a good deal of what is presented as Marxian criticism is not being written by recognized Marxian critics but by people who lack both the critical temperament and a knowledge of Marxism. Yet all the weaknesses of our criticism are ascribed to the handful of "critics." There is too little recognition of what has already been achieved: many writers, upon accepting the revolutionary viewpoint, rush into print to re-discover at length postulates long since established. Further development of Marxians criticism is thus hampered by the tedium of endless repetition. A common characteristic of this repetition is its exclusively agitational character, its insistence on elementary political lessons that should be taken for granted by this time. Despite the literary trimmings, the net result of such criticism is that the reader cannot distinguish, and is trained not to distinguish, between a novel and a pamphlet. When watery political journalism tinged with some literary phraseology usurps the place of criticism, an anti-esthetic soon gets mistaken for a new esthetic.

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As we have suggested, one factor to which this chaos can be traced is the absence of an esthetic of our own which could find its practical application in the evalution of writers and currents. The devolpment of such an esthetic, however, is being seriously hampered by the prevalent vociferous aversion to theoretical analysis. Usually such analysis is dismissed as "bourgeois estheticism," "academicism," and what not. This distate for theory reveals a misconception of the role and nature of criticism. It amounts to carrying over the poorest, rather than the best, traditions of bourgeois critics and is not based on Marxian principles but on what is known as the "pragmatic American temper." In literature as in politics Marxism faces the task of fighting this "pragmatism," which familiar historical conditions have produced in the United States. Those who attack theory invent, of course, private "Marxian" rationalizations by making the intelligence of a mythical reader-ignoramus the norm of the critical level. This reader-ignoramus cannot understand involved analyses, it seems, and must be protected from mental overstrain. But perhaps it is really themselves that the rationalizers are protecting. Such arguments reveal an agitational conception of criticism, confusing it with mediums like the drama, that are easily accessible to mass audiences. One sector of critical writing simplifies for the purpose of daily reviewing, but that is by no means the major task of critics. Whether revolutionary or bourgeois, criticism is in the main a form of conceptual analysis, and is primarily directed at readers familiar with the problems of literature. "Criticism is not the passion of the intellect, but the intellect of passion" (Marx). It is to be judged by its validity, by its generalizing power, and not by its temperature, or by the number of readers who can easily digest it. Its effect is a slow one, in that through influencing actual creation as well as popularizations of thought, it finally reaches its mass audience in an indirect form. In this sense, if literature is a weapon in life, criticism is a weapon in literature. Simplicity has its uses, but the degree of simplicity depends on the character of the specific content. Simple writing should not be confused with primitive thinking. Among our reviewers the cult of popularity has turned into a method of evading the more difficult problems of criticism by stigmatizing the very problems as "bourgeois" and "academic." But what is academic writing? It is not so much a quality of style as a content marginal to important literary problems: a pedantic treatment of minor ideas with the emphasis placed on "data" rather than on analysis. Hence there is often a disparity between the gravity of the style and the triviality of the ideas. To write a long article, as has been recently done, proving that besides urban images, modern literature also contains rural images, is the best example of academicism; and to discover in several thousand words that Shakespeare was influenced by the social forces of his time and

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that his plays are significant historical documents is not only academic but an obfuscation of Shakespeare's power.

Another difficulty confronting Marxian critics is the servile role assigned to it by many of our writers. The critical faculty is narrowed down to the writing of what amounts to little more than publicity for new proletarian novels and plays. Criticism is not primarily responsible to individual writers, but to the general reading public and to literature as a whole. It is by no means obligated to herald each third rate poem as a boon to the proletariat. Its main concerns are with creating a new esthetic, with revaluating literary history, and with advancing proletarian art. The search for new creative methods so prominent in a new literature puts the stress on the critical faculty, not only in critics but in every poet and novelist. In this sense, the tasks of the critic in this particular period are perhaps even more complex than those of the creative writer.

2: *What kind of a weapon is art?* Art, like every other form of communicative activity, is a social instrument and hence an instrument in class struggle. This is an axiom of Marxism. But the problem for criticism is to differentiate between the uses of literature and those of other social instruments. Many errors and vulgarizations are due to the failure to define these differences.

One common assumption is that literature, in its normative character, is as direct a weapon as political and economic writing. By this we mean that literature is assumed to be capable of presenting as explicit a program of political action as, for example, newspaper articles or pamphlets. Some literary forms may approach this type of directness, but if this were to become a criterion of revolutionary literature, it would result in quantitative standards (in the sense that books would be judged by the *number* of readers who respond to them), and a consequent pressure upon literature to shed its specific artistic qualities. It is obvious that quantitative standards ultimately lead to pulp writing. Now the desire on the part of many Marxists to avoid pulp proletarian literature as well as to retain quantitative standards leads to a contradiction, vitiating any hope for consistent evaluations. If it is assumed that a poem should invariably have as direct an agitational effect on as wide a mass of readers as possible, the poet will tend to use his poetry as a vehicle for expressing a meaning nowise different from the logical meaning of straight political writing. What happens further is that the poet necessarily eschews large area of experience that have but an indirect relation to the political ideas he is illustrating, and fails to develop a mode of individual perception.

It seems to us that a clear definition of the way art acts as a weapon is in order. First, literature influences principally those who are susceptible to artistic mediums. Secondly, it is not a system of signposts, but an

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instrument of reorienting social values, attitudes and sympathies. Many a reader asks, "Well, does this poem make me want to go out and do something about it?" In asking such a question, however, the reader assumes that poetry can undertake all the tasks of political education. At most a poem usually helps to crystallize latent urges to action stimulated by a variety of other influences, such as one's economic position, one's friends, one's reading in politics and sociology, and some actual situation in the class struggle one encounters. If the poem's effect is isolated from these other factors, a burden it cannot bear is placed on literature.

Such a consideration of art as a weapon remains abstract, of course, unless it is seen in relation to some concrete audience. Whereas a novel like Rollins' *The Shadow Before* reaches but a few thousand readers in this country, in pre-Hitler Germany it would undoubtedly have reached many times that number. Hence the kind of weapon literature is depends to a great extent on the audience historical conditions have produced for it in any given country. Moreover, with the education that ensues from the radicalization of workers, a novel of the type we have mentioned acquires more and more readers; and, in fact, the very existence of such novels is a factor in the educative process.

The kernel of the problem comes into view, however, when someone asks: "If the working class is still unable to grasp modern literary forms, such as used by Waldo Frank, Dos Passos, Cantwell, Rollins, or poets like Schneider and Fearing, is it not possible to develop simpler forms that will carry the same content?" This question can be answered by summarizing the various points we have made. The new content of revolutionary writing has already introduced greater simplicity. No revolutionary poet has the formal complexities of Cummings, Crane or Pound. And in the future further simplification may be expected. The reason for it is not that the poet consciously set out to differ from Pound, for example, on the score of greater simplicity, but that the very associations and emotions he deals with are more concrete and have greater reference in the lives of most people. An abstract demand for simplification ignores the fact that great literature grows out of the highest level of a contemporary culture. So long as capitalism controls the main organs of education, the values of such literature will come into conflict with the mental habits of untrained readers. But the growth of the revolutionary movement, in breaking these mental habits, is constantly extending its audience.

3: *Merit as ideology and merit as form.* Whenever critics ask whether a reactionary poet could write a great poem, or whether we can use traditional literary methods, or how we judge books of a seemingly neutral subject-matter, they are really approaching the problem of the relation of the merit of a work as ideology to its merit as form. This

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relation is the most complicated question of all criticism, and lies at the foundation of the Marxian esthetic. It is naturally impossible at this time to exhaust all the facets of the problem, but a few pointers may be attempted.

In the first place, let us define the terms ideology and form. It is confusing to pin a *general* ideology, with all its philosophical and political connotations, upon any particular work. Take a novel like Faulkner's *Sanctuary*. Evidently the book does not present the author's "ideology," in the sense that it does not tell us about his general political opinions, his economic beliefs, his attitude to all the questions stirring the South; in fact, it does not even give us anything like a complete view of his esthetic opinions. What it does give us is not ideology directly, but *specific content* in the shape of attitudes toward character, painting of moods, patterns of action, and a variety of sensory and psychological insights. These patterns naturally contain within themselves the implications of a larger world-view (ideology), which the critic may deduce. But the point must be made that *this specific content is not identical with any immediately recognizable reactionary or progressive non-literary program operating in the South today.*

The question now is: What is the relation of the *specific content* to its form*? It seems to us that there is no possible way in which the form—by which we mean the idiom, the structure, the method of selection, the tonal values of the prose, etc.—can be separated from the specific content of any given chapter in the novel. For the power of the specific content inheres in the form in which it is shaped. Restated in a different form, this content becomes a new content. The conclusion is that we are judging a novel only when we are judging its specific content, and not when we judge the general ideology to which it may, by implication, be most closely linked. In the case of Proust, for instance, it is misleading to assume that his values are the values of bourgeois ideology as the phrase is used in most contexts. The specific content of Proust shows many insights into bourgeois social relations that are far removed from the way the normal bourgeois sees them. Many Marxian critics observed this, but what they have done is to isolate this quality of Proust from the myriad of other "presences" that make up his work. Proust's specific content contains so much more, that a distortion ensues when a discussion of his work confines itself to his insight into bourgeois social relations.

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* Most people mean "technique" when they speak of form, but this word, not so definite a term as form and replete with associations in non-creative fields, is used so vaguely as to mean everything and nothing.

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The treating of general ideology and specific content* as synonymous falsifies literary history. In speaking of Balzac, Engels saw the difference very well when he said: "Balzac was politically a legitimist; his great work is a constant elegy on the irreparable decay of good society; his sympathies are with the class that is doomed to extinction. But for all that his satire is never keener, his irony never bitterer, than when he sets in motion the very men and women with whom he sympathizes most deeply—the nobles. And the only men of whom he speaks with undisguised admiration are his bitterest political antagonists, the republican heroes of the Cloitre Saint Merri, the men who at that time (1830-36) were indeed the representatives of the popular masses" (*Letter to Miss Harkness*). Here Engels draws a clear distinction between Balzac's ideology and his specific content. Many errors in evaluating fellow-travellers can be traced to this confusing of their ideology as public men (in their public utterances regarding political parties, the NRA, the question of war and fascism, etc.) with what they actually write. It is conceivable that a writer taken in by the NRA may support it politically, but in writing a novel about a factory, his specific content about the lives of factory workers, if he has observed them accurately, may belie the political views he is upholding. On the other hand, these views may, of course, warp the accuracy of his observation. At all events, it seems that a writer's ideology and his specific content do not always dovetail as neatly as it is commonly assumed. While a general relation between the two, of which we shall speak later, doubtless exists, the critic cannot assume a uniform relation applying to all writers. His job is to examine this relation anew when judging individual creations and creators.

Hence the question of merit as originally posed takes on an altogether different aspect. We must now ask what is the general relation between ideology and specific content. The best ideology of any given period is that which defines most accurately the *necessary* movement of history. Today Marxism is this most advanced ideology. Consequently, given equal talent, a Marxian ideology provides the artist with the possibility of seeing reality more profoundly and more comprehensively than those who subscribe to another system of thought. The degree of individual talent, however, which determines the artistic differentia between two artists on the some ideological terrain, is an irreducible factor in judgment. All that ideology does is to help light up areas of experience, but it does not grant you the eyes with which you see. *It is the most advantageous*

* In this connection it should be noted that the word "content," as it is used in discussions of "form and content," is ordinarily made into a synonym of "ideology," or world-view. That is why we are using *specific content* to refer to the *actual* substance of a work of art.

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interaction of talent and ideology, which permits the development of a great literature. When ideology limits talent, as is the case with reactionary writers, this interaction becomes most disadvantageous. Committed to the conception that all Jews are blackguards and Shylocks, the fascist writer cannot possibly give us a representative picture of a Jew as a character in fiction. When T. S. Eliot entered his Anglo-catholic phase, his ideology set up a wall between his poetic talent and its realization, with the result that, as is generally admitted, his recent poetry is inferior to his early work. The specific content of his religious verse does not contain the realness of *Prufrock* or *The Waste Land.* When he faces the task of evaluation, the Marxian critic must not only take into consideration all these relations between ideology and content, but must also fasten his attention upon all the particulars which gives any work its actual quality. The two tasks go hand in hand. The isolation of the first from the second makes for political discussions of literature, not criticism; the isolation of the second from the first makes for estheticism.

The Marxian method in criticism cannot be considered a purely sociological one. It is a method of correlating all factors, including the psychological. Yet it is not an haphazard pluralism, but a method which sees the class factor as the determinant.

4: *The making of revolutionary literature.* The class struggle as an economic and political reality is the *directive image* of revolutionary literature, but around that center the artist builds a network of human experience in all its multiplicity. The class struggle is not a mold into which the artist stuffs experience; it is the reality giving coherence and structure to wide ranges of life. Those artists who do not understand this are guilty of an excessive rationalism which makes them present reality geometrically, rather than as a living flux. This excessive rationalism is perhaps responsible for more bad revolutionary writing than any other single defect. Any editor of a proletarian magazine can testify to this. It is also at the root of a vulgar ultilitarian attitude to writing which at times shows itself in our criticism. In looking for a conscious *manipulation* of experience, the critic ceases to respond to the deeper sources of the creative process.

There are still too many writers and readers who see class conflict in literature only at the point of physical collision between bourgeoisie and proletariat. This idea leads to the *summarizing* of the rich backgrounds of workers' lives up to the terminal of open strife, as in strikes, demonstrations, and other overt political acts. But it is the combing of the vast and complex background behind these overt acts that would give us epics of working class experience. Despite many successful, but largely marginal, approaches to this theme on the part of middle class and many

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revolutionary novelists, the working class, with all its thousands of occupations, habits, psychological relations—in short, its very life—is still the unexplored continent of fiction. What Balzac did for many strata of the bourgeoisie, what Joyce did in Bloom for the lower middle class and in Stephen for the sensitive intellectual, still awaits the genius of proletarian artists. American writers are now becoming aware of the proletariat as a distinct social class. Though it is true that middle class attitudes still prevail among workers, their economic orbit separates their day-to-day existence from that of the bourgeoisie. A workingclass panorama of types and individuals of the scope of *Ulysses,* for example, would uncover new layers of literary material for revolutionary writers and start a fresh tradition in American literature. In novels like *The Land of Plenty* and *The Disinherited* we get a sense of thematic exploration that suggests the immense possibilities ahead of us.

The mechanical conception of utility, however, takes its toll in criticism by foisting upon writers formulas that prevent originality and boldness of conception. Some critics are clamoring for satiric writing, others for poetry in the form of mass recitation, ballads or songs that can be put to music, and so on. There is no denying that some new types of poetry would enrich our literature, but no one type can be made into a norm. Revolutionary literature is not the literature of a sect, like surrealism or objectivism; it is the product of an emerging civilization, and will contain the wealth and diversity which any cultural range offers. In this sense, we shall have poets who will have learned much from Eliot and Crane, as well as poets who will have learned more from Joe Hill. The various types of poetry will fulfil various functions, some more and some less important. But to conceive of one as excluding the other is to narrow the cultural expression of the revolutionary movement. Similarly in criticism, there is no one type of critic who exhausts the functions of Marxian thinking in this field. Some will concern themselves mainly with the more conceptual problems, others with specific writers, still others with the literary past; but the attitude which selects only one type of critic as relevant is either fickle or sectarian.

Usually this attempt to formularize methods of writing represents a break with literary tradition. When we said that our poets will learn both from Eliot and from Joe Hill we implied that it is possible to learn from both not because we believe we can learn from *anybody,* but because there is a variety of fruitful influence in world literature, past and present, which revolutionary writers may select for their individual purposes. Some critics have denied, directly or indirectly, a usable tradition in postwar poetry. Their argument is that this poetry is obscure and pessimistic, and that it expresses private sorrows and personal methods. We quote

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one typical judgment: "Eliot and kindred reactionaries have evolved forms that express their own restlessness and futility. The attempt to use their technical devices for the expression of the revolutionary spirit inevitably involves a fundamental contradiction, and the resulting poems are confused and ineffective."

This approach to the literary heritage of American revolutionary poets is more like a search for *Marxian* ancestors than a sound orientation toward the critical reworking of the past. The very fact that most of our poets have been influenced by the so-called "experimental reactionary poets" shows either that most revolutionary verse is quite useless or that the conception of this influence is incorrect. In the first place, the "restlessness and futility" of Eliot is a form of revolt against existing society, and therefore establishes a point of contact (usable elements) between him and the revolutionary poets. Whatever it may be, this "restlessness and futility" cannot possibly be private. And the new methods developed by the experimental poets are not mere eccentricities, but the result of the assimilation of urban environments in poetry, reflecting the entire modern sensibility. It's all very well to speak of fresh idioms and new rhythms, but so far we have heard of no tangible suggestions as to the actual nature of these rhythms and idioms. In a classic definition of "Leftism" Lenin said that it "persists in the unconditional repudiation of old forms and fails to see that the new content is breaking through all and sundry forms" (*"Left"-Wing Communism*). Many of the forms of post-war poetry are a case in point. Eliot has become a sort of bogeyman. But everyone knows that it is not Eliot's recent ideology (his royalism, Anglo-catholicism, etc.) which is influencing revolutionary poets, but the specific content of his earlier poetry, which was informed by a large degree of social realism. Moreover, there is a real contradiction in labeling the methods of the experimental poets as "technical devices"—if they were such, they could be easily utilized without any danger of ideological pollution—and then warning our poets against adopting these "technical devices." Post-war poetry is certainly composed of much more than technical devices. And these methods cannot be mere technical devices and weighty components of bourgeois ideology at the same time.

There is no use whatsoever in talking about the usable past if we assume beforehand that nothing is usable save that which is near-Marxian. Tradition supplies us with a basis for formal criteria, with a source of artistic training, and with currents of influence. These influences are not always selected, we believe, on the basis of *general ideological kinship*, but often on the basis of specific objectives which a revolutionary poet, for example, sets for himself in any specific poem. When Alfred Hayes was writing a panoramic poem of New York,* he naturally turned to Crane

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whose ethos of the city is epitomized in *The Bridge*. The differences are obviously there, but so is the influence, and Hayes should not be stigmatized for this influence. There may be disagreements about the degree and nature of the influence, but on the ground that Crane's ideology is alien to ours, such an accusation cannot hold water.

It is patent that the variety of objectives in revolutionary literature creates a diversity of specific influences and uses of tradition. Different schools and currents of revolutionary writing do in fact appear. The job of criticism is to clarify the aims and premises of each current, to relate one to the other, and to encourage some rather than others. It must fight those currents that are moving away from the aims of Marxism. And it is in the interaction between the critical and creative faculties that a greater consciousness of creative methods will emerge.

DISCUSSION

Newton Arvin:

With the spirit of Mr. Phelps and Mr. Rahv's article on criticism it seems to me difficult not to agree. In reaction from the solipsistic æstheticism of the *Dial* school and the inane eclecticism of the liberal and individualist critics, the small group of serious Marxist critics and reviewers have done much to bring back or to call into being a healthy consciousness of the external world, an awareness of the inescapable social responsibilities of the writer, and a sense of the need for rigorous, unimpressionistic analysis. But probably no one feels that this is enough, and what Mr. Phelps and Mr. Rahv seem to be pointing to is a fuller realization—a now extremely desirable realization—of the possibilities of the dialectical method. Too much of what passes for Marxist criticism in this country has been, as they suggest, unilateral, one-dimensional, and absolutistic; too little of it has taken real advantage of the richly dynamic naturalism of the Marxian tradition; too little of it has kept alive the spirit, for example, of Marx's own note on Greek mythological poetry or of his enthusiasm for such a book as *Tom Jones*. There has been too strong a tendency to deal with literary problems in terms of crude alternatives: *either* a writer's work is generally acceptable (perhaps mainly on political grounds), *or* it is inacceptable and even mischievous; *either* ideas (in this case literary or critical ideas) are easily stateable in materialistic or revolutionary terms, *or* they are survivals of bourgeois ways of thinking.

To say that these are crude alternatives is by no means necessarily

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* *The Port of New York*, Partisan Review, No. 6.

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to give comfort to the supporters of an anarchic or irresponsible relativism. It is not to deny the obligation of arriving at clearcut judgments, of constantly making sharper and sharper (not less and less sharp) distinctions, and of carrying on unremitting struggle against what is really regressive, destructive, or obscurantist in certain ways of thinking and writing. There may well be situations, moreover, in which it is practically more important to discredit certain writers and certain ideas than to keep the dialectical scales in fastidious balance. This is only to say that literary criticism is but one activity among others, and that it must sometimes yield—for it cannot be carried on in a woodland castle—to more pressing and more desperate necessities. But it has a life and a utility of it own, and these can best be realized when it is allowed to explore it own territory, the history and the present practice of the literary arts, with a certain freedom and liberality. If it is to serve a more than merely literary purpose, a social and historical purpose, in the long run it will do this best if in the short run it is allowed to move its limbs with the minimum of external restraint.

This free movement is exactly what dialectics does not simply condone but demand. In the study of literature, as in the study of economics, no manner of thinking is more sterile and therefore more injurious than thinking in a straight line on one level: this, in fact, has been the vice of too many bourgeois critics as it has been of too many bourgeois economists. A thoughtful Marxist critic will be far more sensitive than any buorgeois critic can be, to the number of different forces that have always to be taken into account, and the concept of creative contradictions will be ever-present to him. It is fundamental to Marxism, I suppose, to recognize the progressive nature of capitalism in its beginnings and in its prime, and to emphasize the contradiction between its positive achievements and its wastefulness, its duplicity, and its inhumanity. Comparable contradictions are present in the work of all the really interesting and memorable writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and of course, with many qualifications, in the writers of our own time, both individualistic and revolutionary. Part of the critic's task is to get this complex interplay of creative and destructive, of fruitful and sterile elements into the truest possible focus; and if, in this process, he cannot dispense with historical learning and an austere logic, no more can he dispense with intuitive tact and an imaginative skill in dealing with intangibles. The correctest political thinking in the world will avail him but little at this point.

The result of criticizing both the writers of the past and those of the moment in a close but dialectical manner is, among other things, to add a dimension to the truth of the Marxist position, and thus enormously to enrich the intellectual and spiritual resources available to the writers

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who, by taking that position, are now making literary history. To speak of an example with which I am more familiar than with many, the conscious political outlook of Nathaniel Hawthorne, though it was democratic in a curious negative way, was consistent with his taking a fatalistic and indifferentist attitude toward the problems of hs time, including slavery, and with his writing a eulogistic campaign biography of the doughface, Franklin Pierce, who was the political tool of the Southern plantation oligarchs. If a gifted writer's mind were the simple unity it might be, this would be the last word to be said about Hawthorne. But his work as a whole is the scene of remarkable contradictions, and what is most interesting in it is its slow, measured, intuitive, and one is tempted to say unintentional criticism of the individualism that passed for gospel truth in that generation and long afterward.

This is the third dimension in Hawthorne; and to come nearer to our own time, there is some indiscriminateness in the repudiation of all the reformist writers of the Roosevelt age on the simple unilateral basis of their political naiveté. David Graham Phillips and Winston Churchill, for example, have been consigned to oblivion hastily and a little condescendingly. They were "goo-goo" writers, it is said, and full of enthusiasm for Beveridge and Roosevelt. One can understand this impatience, and recognize that their political outlook is *one* of the considerations, though only one, that make it impossible to speak of them for a moment in the same breath with Zola or Tolstoy. But in spite of this they were serious American writers whose literary powers it is easier and more convenient to agree to forget than to define responsibly and sensitively; in the moral transition during which the inherited standards of American individualism lost their authority, the honest, carefully documented, richly descriptive, and sometimes affecting novels of Phillips and Churchill expressed something vital, something still full of meaning for us, as nothing else quite expressed it.

This is and can be only a glance at a subject that in itself ramifies like an elm-tree, but at least some of the ramifications appear to be on the verge of the most intensive discussion. That discussion, it is perhaps not too optimistic to hope, will bring us nearer to a clear understanding of the ways in which literary history and criticism can be drastic, uncompromising, and (when they have direct political implications) clear-cut, without being monosyllabic or absolutist; of the ways in which what is still positive in bourgeois literature can be distinguished from what has lost all ts interest or repute; and of the ways in which the new literature can be rescued both from a flaccid catholicity and a narrow political utilitarianism.

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Granville Hicks:

It seems to me that it is more useful, in approaching the discussions that will take place at the Writers' Congress, to define issues rather than try to settle them. Therefore, instead of commenting directly on the theories presented by Rahv and Phelps, I shall describe, so far as I can, the attitude of Marxist critics in general towards these theories.

1. In discussing the function of criticism Rahv and Phelps have placed great emphasis on the importance of æsthetics. Personally I should not quarrel with them on this ground. It is true, however, that many of our critics are not entirely convinced of the all-importance of formal æsthetics, and I doubt if their position should be subjected to such scorn as Rahv and Phelps employ. Experience shows that, in the discussion of literary work, persons who cannot formulate æsthetic theories often perform notable services for their readers, and that, on the other hand, the most ingenious elaborators of theoretical systems are sometimes incapable of writing decent reviews. The explanation obviously is that effective criticism depends on the quality of the critic's response to literary work. The ideal critic combines a clear and comprehensive æsthetic theory with sensitivity, experience in literature and life, and the power to put himself in the creator's place. But such a combination is actually rare, and those whose chief concern it is to elaborate the theories have no right to condemn the more empirical and impressionistic critics. Impression is dangerous when it is made into a theory, but in practice it may be fruitful.

2. I think most Marxists will agree with Rahv and Phelps that the effects of literature are subtle, varied, often imperceptible, usually unpredictable. Although none of us is in a position to say precisely what the effects of a work of art are, I think we know well enough that the presence or absence of immediate, short-run effects such as find expression in overt action is no criterion of literary excellence.

3. It is also true, I believe, that most Marxist critics, although they may not accept the precise account of the relationship between form and content that Rahv and Phelps offer, do agree with them that the relationship is close and that form and content cannot fruitfully be considered apart from each other.

4. There is much less agreement on the problem of tradition. That proletarian authors can learn something from bourgeois authors presumably all Marxist critics would affirm, but what it is they can learn is a question to which there are many answers. I cannot feel that Rahv and Phelps have helped to clear away the confusions and misunderstandings that surround this problem, but at least they have called attention to its importance and its difficulty.

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That these four problems are important no one will deny. There are other problems, however, that also deserve discussion. Rahv and Phelps have concerned themselves only with æsthetic theory, but there are other essential elements in the Marxist critic's equipment. By the very fact of its insistence on the relation between social life and literature, Marxism places a heavy burden on the critic. Not only must he have a thorough familiarity with the literature of the world; he must also have an adequate knowledge of history and economics. The backwardness of Marxist historical science in this country, furthermore, forces him to become a pioneer in the analysis of the periods he deals with. And the acquisition of the requisite knowledge, especially in the midst of the daily tasks of the revolution, is not easy. Inadequate knowledge is, I believe, quite as often responsible for our failings as inadequate theoretical foundation.

And there is still a different type of problem, perhaps the most important of all. This is essentially a problem of the critic's practical functioning. There are three phases of it I should like to discuss:

1. We—poets, novelists, dramatists, as well as critics,—have carried over into the proletarian literary movement some of the worst habits of the bourgeois literary world. These habits become particularly apparent in criticism, but they are not limited to critics. There is a distressing amount of the most uncomradely sniping and backbiting. We want self-criticism, of course, and our criticism of each other should be frank and full, but I think we need to ask ourselves whether, in criticizing one another, we are entirely free from personal rancor and petty jealousy. De we vent personal grudges, support little cliques, help this friend or hurt that enemy? If we do—and I am afraid we do—we weaken our movement.

2. We also need to examine more closely our relations with the poets, novelists, and dramatists. It is unfortunately true, as Rahv and Phelps point out, that the writers often demand what, in the very nature of criticism, critics cannot give. It is also true, I am afraid, that writers sometimes allow personal vanity to dictate their judgments of the critics' work. But we should look at our own faults. We make too little effort to understand the writer's problems; we look too seldom through his eyes. (Poets, novelists, and dramatists, when they turn critics, are, curiously, usually as guilty of this failing as anyone else.) Moreover, we remain almost purely negative; we seem unable to evoke positive literary achievement as the great bourgeois critics of the past sometimes succeeded in doing. We not only fail to give anything directly to the writers; we rarely contribute to the creation of the kind of audience that inspires greatness.

3. Finally, the critics must seriously consider their relation to the revolutionary movement itself. The critic is always in peculiar danger of

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becoming doctrinaire, of losing touch not merely with writers but also with readers, of handing down from some mist-veiled mountaintop meaningless decalogs. For the revolutionary critic this is fatal. And there can be no remedy but actual participation in revolutionary activity.

There are yet other problems that deserve discussion. I do not hold so low an opinion of current Marxist criticism as do Rahv and Phelps, but I am conscious of innumerable defects, which I should like to see remedied. The development of an adequate æsthetics would undoubtedly contribute to the improvement of critical writing, but much else is also necessary.

Obed Brooks:

I was interested to see Alfred Hayes' poem *The Port of New York* cited in this discussion, because it struck me when I first read it as a fairly crucial example of one kind of proletarian literature, and a kind that is not unlike the Marxian criticism which Wallace Phelps and Philip Rahv deprecate in the first sections of their article. With remarkable mimetic talent Hayes reproduces the specific content (I retain the terminology of this article) of Crane's poetry, echoes the phrases and observations a sensitive reader finds memorable. He makes his a proletarian poem, however, merely by opposing Crane's ideology in the closing lines, by saying of Columbia, "her myth is done." This is no doubt a just observation, but it is not the resultant of our reading the rest of the poem. It has no poetic validity; it is an added judgment coming from other experience not represented in the poem. Hayes is not using borrowed elements dramatically, as Eliot does, to express quite different feelings of his own; he is using them partly for their merits, partly as certificates of his own right to criticize. He feels what Crane felt, but he thinks something should be added.

That this is a conscious method a quotation from a review by Hayes of a book of short stories seems to show: "With the exception of Hemingway's 'The Gambler, Nun and Radio', the stories do not answer important questions." Here I agree with Rahv and Phelps that it is not primarily the business of literature to answer questions. When it is complementary to economic and political influences, a "profound" rendering of even limited portions of contemporary experience will help to fix a reader's attitude, will make him feel that only certain kinds of social action are any longer effective or tolerable. But I believe Rahv and Phelps identify profundity with Marxism, not Marxism sloganized, but Marxism assimilated, a determinant of perception. That is why I do not agree with what they say about Hayes and Crane and Eliot.

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It is quite all right to like Proust and Eliot, and even to imitate them, but I think one would recognize frankly the pastiche effect of attempts to proletarianize them. It is true that in their best work they are critical of modern society, but most great literature has been critical, and there is no reason why the specific content of these men should influence the reader more toward Marxism than Fascism or Distributivism. I do not think a shot gun wedding to the correct line alters the case, and it is certainly detrimental to literary effect. In accepting the slogan of identification with the proletariat, writers have often arbitrarily extended bourgeois culture to embrace all society. Empson, the English critic, thinking particularly of proletarian novels, has described this as very much like the Theocritan or pastoral tradition, the use of intellectualized and intellectual peasants in periods of elaborate literary refinement. It shows how common this attitude is, that it should be necessary for an American Marxist critic to say that he would not recommend Proust to the average longshoreman.

Sensibility comes only after the assimilation and practise of ideas. When men as a result of experience or willful penetration become completely aware of new relationships in experience, when Marxism is intuitive and perceptive, sensibility will take care of itself, there will be no problem of where it can be legitimately borrowed. We see promise of this in work like Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire,* Dimitroff's speeches, Cantwell's articles on the San Francisco strike, Spender's poem *Vienna.* Although such sensibility is qualitatively different from anything in bourgeois literature, it does respond emotionally to other world views. The ideas of race and discipline in the mind of a Hitler youth have as real existence in social struggles as the purposes of a Thyssen. But a Marxist should have sufficient imaginative and emotional integrity so that when he reproduces the consciousness of a Carlyle, a Lawrence or Wyndham Lewis, he gives them their own proper significance as living elements in a dialectic whole, as a dramatist uses various characters. But this seems to me very different from converting bits of Emerson and Eliot as if they were fixed values, and attaching to them one's own message. Such adaptation is a necessary stage in proletarian literature before a new sensibility emerges, and it correctly represents compromises and transitions in the poet's own mind, but I think a distinction should be recognized between this and Marxism more fully realized.

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POETRY

Edwin Rolfe

THE HOPE FOR A RENAISSANCE in American poetry has been expressed continuously ever since the abortive poetry revival of 1910-1920. The shouting has come from all directions: from the extreme right as well as, more recently, from the left; from the little half-dead lyricists who ape and thereby insult what they regard as "tradition" as well as from the boisterous and prosaic school which is blatant not only in its manifestoes but in its verse.

Let there be no mistake. There has been no renaissance in American poetry: the time is not yet ripe. But all the elements prerequisite to a profound revival are present: the hope, the energy, the revolutionary world-view and its clear sense of tradition, of continuity, of exciting living in the midst of profound social and spiritual change. It is these things which, if fused with and expressed in our work, can speed a real revival in American poetry.

These virtues cannot be claimed by any of the bourgeois poets. Tradition and continuity die for them as their contemporary world and values fester. Their worldview is that of a drowning swimmer whose strength ebbs with each motion; their energy is born of panic and the struggle against certain defeat. They can be falsely blatant and rhetorical or meekly and mystically resigned. Certainty and hope are beyond them.

Only the revolutionary poets can today claim possession of the qualities which nurture and feed a great art. Only the poets who announce change, who as men are certain of the road they travel, can herald a new day in American poetry. These poets—the revolutionaries, whether of proletarian origin or not—belong to us, the working class. Their very youth provides hope.

Let us survey the American scene and attempt to eliminate the deadwood.

No one today takes seriously the infrequent and progressively-deteriorating work of Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, the Benets, Robert Frost. These poets, in their present state of inactivity or tiresome repetition, belong together today, although at one time the work of each was distinct from that of the others.

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Amy Lowell, Elinor Wylie and Vachel Lindsay are dead. Wallace Stevens is remembered by *Harmonium;* he is no longer a living poet. Conrad Aiken's *Preludes* are mute testimony of his poetic bankruptcy.

Those of us who are writing poetry today still remember and cherish many of these poets at their best. But we value them as we value T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound—as poets whose best work was a spur toward our own poetic activity; also, unfortunately, as poets whose best work, whose very lives, fell far short of our needs and our aims.

Who then remains? Foremost is the figure of Hart Crane, strange, tortured, mystical—author of *The Bridge* and *For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen.* Two other poets are left: Archibald MacLeish and Robinson Jeffers. The statures of both of these men have assumed great dignity and power. But the influence of Jeffers is on the very young and unformed or on the old and twisted and defeated. And MacLeish's influence is as yet incomplete, since he continues to function as a poet, and as a poet to grow and change. The stress in his work varies, so that younger poets, reading his books, often feel that he himself is not quite clear about his own direction.

I have listed here only those poets whose names have meaning to the general public which reads and finds a certain importance and enjoyment in poetry. They have been listed together, although there are many vital differences in each individual's work. A discussion of these differences, however, would be outside the immediate scope of this paper.

There are other American poets, less well known—such as Horace Gregory, Malcolm Cowley, Joseph Freeman, Michael Gold—whose mark on the younger revolutionary poets has been as great, if not greater, than those whom I have mentioned.

Many of the older poets are important in American letters, if not in American life. To be important to a country's life, a poet must be more than a skilled versifier (Stevens) or one who, however uncouth his metrics (Sandburg), strikes a new, modern, living note. To be significant in the most real sense, a poet must affect not only other poets, as some of these older poets have influenced us; he must leave his mark on the world in which he lives and in which other men will live. His work must reach, in varying degrees of intensity, all the literate men of his age and land, and, through them, the larger less learned mass. In the light of this, we can say with certainty than none of the older poets really left more than a fragmentary mark on their time or on ours.

We younger poets therefore look to other men and to other material for the stuff we need. Our "ancestors," to use a word which has assumed almost a mystic meaning for several of our British contemporaries, will be those men who have somehow come to symbolize the link between the

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world that is dying and the one that is, in our time, coming to birth. We are, and must be in the deepest sense, internationalists and revolutionaries; not only politically, but (what is more important to us as poets and to the future of poetry) in our work.

We will disregard boundaries, and not permit our love for our land to blind us to the position of the human beings who live in it. We will claim all that is worth salvaging in the American tradition of struggle, revolt, progress. We will claim everything that is vital in the culture of the ages. Our symbolic and heroic figures will be those of the men whose lives signify advance from one period to another in the history of progressive human thought and achievement, in the history of the class struggle. Men like Spartacus, Galileo, Karl Marx, Lenin, have meaning for us and our work. They are our most deeply felt, most perfectly realized ancestors. Some of us have already used these figures in our work. Thus:

> "Look up from the book!
>
> She is not a paper-minded concept.
> She conceives hugely.
> She makes the future.
>
> Look!
>
> There is Karl Marx.
>
> This is your Spring.
>
> There is such a woman."
>
> (S. Funaroff: *A Love Poem About Spring*)

> "His dialectic enervates the doomed,
> inspires the mass to courage: not for long
> can our foes delay our unfolding destiny.
>
> Witness the death which he foresaw, the seed
> springing to flower, flinging its color, its breath
> into the long-patient channels of our need—
> silent no longer! Now, fifty years since his days
> met their last midnight, we his countless heirs
> rise dauntless in all lands, his wisdom in our brain,
> the added lessons of half a century,
> to impregnate the earth with newer life, to win
> the final battle; and, classless, to assume
> the final right to our supremacy."
>
> (Edwin Rolfe: *Homage to Karl Marx*)

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It is an axiom of literary criticism that an incomplete fusion produces an unsuccessful work. Overemphasis on content makes for didacticism, and overemphasis on *form* gives preciosity. The two are interpenetrating, mutually affective elements. This relation presents a significant illustration of dialectical unity.

The fact that a literary work presents a single impact, and the knowledge that no artist sets out to combine his form and content suggests that an underlying *vision* or *sensibility* is the agent of selection and perception. The writer's grasp of intellectual and emotional currents and his feeling for prose and poetic forms as instruments which have already expressed some phases of these currents constitute a single quality. A literary work is an organic whole like a man's personality or some vivid experience. Just as the personality is the complete impression which a man makes, so the sensibility of a poem is its total effect. The *feel* of the idiom, the metaphor, the conception, and the way all hang together—this is the sensibility. The sensibility of any single work is of a piece with the entire sensibility of the writer in his complete work. And the similarity of style, theme and image in the works of any literary period shows that the sensibility of a writer is a shoot from the pervading sensibility of his environment. When we remark that Eliot has been influenced by French symbolism, we really mean that his work shows a similar sense of language, mood and theme. The finished product is the sensibility of the poem, but the sensibility of the writer conditions the sensibility of each one of his works, in that it dictates his perception, choice of theme, quality of style, and susceptibility to some kinds of literary influence rather than others. Today, when a writer casts his lot with revolution, his revolutionary purposes and associations shape his sensibility toward proletarian literature. Only the requirements of abstraction in analysis could separate, for example, W. H. Auden's break with his class, his sense of bourgeois frustration and brutality, his hope in communism, his nimble satirical thrusts, his clipt, buoyant verse, from each other.

The apex of the question is reached when it is asked whether all these elements or analogous ones in other writers must all appear together, or whether some can be assimilated while others are discarded: in its most incisive and relevant form the question reads—does content determine form? In their Auden texture these elements are all peculiar to Auden's poetry; when assimilation or carryover takes place, some variant is used and a new quality emerges. And in any specific work, in one sense the content does determine the form, because the writer's sense of his content is part of his complete system of perception which generates his form. It is just as true, however, to say that the form determines the content. Nevertheless, it is only after contact with completed works that we are

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There remain, with the exception of Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman, (whose peculiar positions in American revolutionary poetry will be discussed later), seven American poets who are active, young, productive: Horace Gregory, Kenneth Fearing, Isidor Schneider, Ben Maddow, S. Funaroff, Alfred Hayes and Muriel Rukeyser. Each of these poets has, if not a solid body of published work, a number of poems that are worth preserving for varied reasons. Gregory has *Chelsea Rooming House* (1930) *No Retreat* (1933) and *Chorus for Survival* (1935). Kenneth Fearing has, in his poetry of the past two or three years by far eclipsed his first performance in *Angel Arms* (1929). Isidor Schneider has published *The Temptation of Anthony* (1928) and *Comrade-Mister* (1935).

The youngest poets listed have each several poems which are noteworthy. Ben Maddow has *Red Decision* and *The Communist Party of Germany;* S. Funaroff has his contributions to *We Gather Strength* (1933), as well as more recent, better developed work; Alfred Hayes has *In a Coffee Pot, Underground* and *Smolny;* Muriel Rukeyser has her book-poem, *Theory of Flight.*

Among these younger poets—and it is they whose work I wish to discuss primarily, various tendencies are to be observed. Some of these, as I have said, promise much for the future of revolutionary poetry. Others are dangerous.

Roughly, although all of these young men and women have broken away from the slipshod, blatant verse of their predecessors, new signs of danger have appeared in their work. These signs were to be expected. While they are, possibly, some of the symptoms of the growing pains of the new revolutionary poetry, they should be pointed out and warned against lest they become irrevocably part of our poetry, to its decided harm. But to point out these symptoms and the attendant dangers, we must examine their origins.

In 1926 the utmost confusion existed in the world of revolutionary literature. We young fledgling poets, who were in our 'teens then, read the *New Masses,* established that year. We read the *Daily Worker,* then two years old, which had just moved to New York from Chicago. Some of us took Michael Gold's "Writers' Workshop" class at the old Workers' School on East Fourteenth Street. We studied journalism and had fragmentary talks with Joseph Freeman. Scarcely beyond high school age (many of us still attended high school), we were at the stage where we were still writing our adolescent poetry about friendship, nature, love. Some of us were members of the Young Workers League and we participated desultorily in street-corner meetings and in small neighborhood demonstrations and strikes.

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But when we turned to the writing of revolutionary poetry, we had nothing to guide us. We had, if we looked for it, Michael Gold's *A Strange Funeral in Braddock;* we saw his *The Girl by the River* when it appeared in the *New Masses;* we could still buy Arturo Giovannitti's *Arrows in the Gale* and the thoroughly inadequate little anthology, *Poems for Workers,* at the Jimmie Higgins Bookshop on University Place. The parents of some of us had belonged to the old Socialist Party before the war and had joined the Communist Party upon its formation: we could still find stray copies of the old *Masses* and *The Liberator* in our homes.

But Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman, the only two living poets with whom we had occasional personal contact, could give us nothing through their work and very little through their talks. We were still too young. Consequently we returned again and again to the age-old themes of adolescence.

But the need for expression in verse of our activities and emotional experiences in the revolutionary movement could not be stifled. We therefore began to put into verse form the speeches that we made or would have made at street-corner meetings. Every poem was a call to action: an exhortation to the reader to awake from his political lethargy and join the class-conscious forces of the working class. Other poems described accidents in shops, bemoaned the trials and miseries of long hours and slavish conditions in the factories. It was, in short, journalistic verse that we wrote—serving the same purpose as a polemic, although far less effectively. It was not literature.

Because we had no model, no effective teacher, we had to make our way blindly, experimenting with a number of forms. All the great poetry of world literature was available, all the great literary tradition of history, but we could make no use of it. We forced it out of our consciousness when we wrote our revolutionary verse. Our themes—our subject matter—which should have been the most vital part of our poetry, remained static, unconvincing. These themes became, in our hands, almost trite. A poem about the death of one militant worker repeated what we had said about another militant worker. A fatigued coal miner was no different, in our verse, from a fatigued needle trades worker; and this, strangely enough, even though we ourselves had worked in clothing factories and had on several occasions descended into the pits of mines.

We were up against a dead end and could advance no further. And we were on the point of giving up: turning to fiction or turning to actual organization (as Martin Russak and David Gordon, promising poets of that time, did) when we began to see the idols of our adolescence—Joseph Freeman and Michael Gold—no longer as idols, but, more maturely, as teachers, comrades, companions, men.

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Both of these men did more in their different ways for revolutionary literature in this country during those formative years than any others. Talking, lecturing, teaching, writing, they kept their ideas and convictions alive and growing when all others descended into bogs, were sidetracked, or deserted. It was Joseph Freeman who finally showed some of us our real direction, our real goal.

"You are revolutionists," he told us. "You need no better start as writers, as poets. As revolutionists you see the world of men and events in a certain light. When you read a newspaper story, you react in a certain way. You react as Marxists. Now, the trouble with all of you so far has been that whenever you have taken pen in hand you have forgotten the most important and true perception and sensibility that you possess. You have retained your personal sensitivity, but you have, consciously or unconsciously, discarded your revolutionary sensitivity. This is disastrous for you. It can result only in semi-integrated personalities, in poetry that can never be true.

"Stop thinking of yourselves," he said, "as poets who are also revolutionists or as revolutionists who are also poets. Remember that you are *revolutionary poets.* Then work hard at your poetry. The rest will follow."

Freeman followed up this advice by showing a few of us his own large volume of poems, a volume which, unfortunately, has never been published. We saw, just as those who read his poems in *Partisan Review* and *Dynamo* saw, what he meant.

Not all of us owe so much directly to Joseph Freeman. Some of us also trace much that is important in our poetry to Horace Gregory, for his finely conceived, beautifully skilled work. We owe much of our zeal and fire and conviction to Michael Gold's early poems. And, while the bourgeois literary world seems to have already forgotten Malcolm Cowley's admirable *Blue Juniata,* which the New Masses also completely muffed early in 1929 (my review was considered too favorable, in those sectarian days, to merit publication), many of us still treasure the poems for their sincerity, their narrative of a quest from the farm-home, through school, through exile after the World War, and back to America and a new awareness of our times.

It was not long after we heard and understood Joseph Freeman's words that revolutionary poetry began to emerge as a conscious art, well on its path toward maturity. The old sectarian and æsthetically bad verse of the Rebel Poet magazine and yearbooks, while it was not dead, was at least outshadowed by the appearance of a new, more solid, more æsthetically accomplished kind of poetry. *We Gather Strength,* which presented the work of Herman Spector, Joseph Kalar, Edwin Rolfe and S. Funaroff,

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appeared early in 1933 and was greeted by Isidor Schneider in *The New Republic* with the following words:

> "For Americans the publishing of *"We Gather Strength"* is an event worth dating. Here are four young writers who are building their careers as poets outside the capitalist publishing apparatus . . . The struggling left-wing literary magazines have provided them their public . . . They are not only creating a revolutionary poetry but gathering together what will probably be the most responsible and satisfying audience poetry can hope for in our time. We can look forward to something more from their joined strength than from any other group in America . . ."

Shortly afterward, Alfred Hayes's poems began to appear regularly in the Daily Worker, and sections of Muriel Rukeyser's *Theory of Flight* were published in *Dynamo, The Student Review* and the *New Masses. Partisan Review* and *Dynamo,* both edited (æsthetically as well as politically) on solid, valid principles, commenced publication.

These poets are still writing, but seem at present to be at a standstill. For one thing, they are not sufficiently prolific, which is something a growing mass working class movement must demand of its artists in all fields. In many cases this is caused by their poverty, and by the fact that they must spend a too-considerable portion of their time at their jobs, earning a living. Although these jobs keep them alive, they do not permit them the time and energy needed for creative work. To the time spent working must be added the time devoted to political and organizational activity, which saps their creative energy still further. Their lack of fecundity is, therefore, due not only to their limitations as artists, but also in great part to their circumstances.

There are, moreover, more serious shortcomings in their work. A revolutionary sensibility can be nurtured most perfectly by a complete identification of the poet with the class whose struggles and destiny he champions. This identification must be emotional, ideological, not alone—as is the case very frequently—intellectual. Such an identification, again, does not mean that the poet will discard the great historical traditions with which he has become acquainted in the bourgeois world. Quite the contrary: it means that he will perceive tradition and history in clearer, more understandable terms. This is one of the reasons, I think, for the frequent obscurity in the poems of Ben Maddow and Muriel Rukeyser. It is the reason for the vagueness of Rukeyser's images and heavily-weighted allusions; she refers to historical figures, phenomena, events seeing them through the misty bourgeois spectacles of her earlier training, not through

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the clearer and more powerful lens of the Marxist magnifying glass.

Another deplorable thing in the work of these younger poets is their tendency toward formula-writing. However skilled the poetry may be, the static conception always mars the poem. Simply, the formula is to describe an event in verse, add a second part of interpretation (generally pseudo-philosophical), and wind up with a third part which, instead of tying the first two parts together as it is meant to do, introduces a prophecy or a call to action, very often bombastic and in the barest, worst sense, didactic. Such formula-writing, from which Maddow and Hayes have suffered, is always ineffective.

Another danger in revolutionary verse is the tendency to sloganize. Many of us recognized long ago that the use of slogans was entirely valid in revolutionary poetry, but that this validity depended on two factors: the slogan's meaning in actual life and struggle, and its integration with the poem. Harry Alan Potamkin and A. B. Magil, I believe, were the first American poets who used widely-known, meaningful slogans effectively in their verse. Others too have used them to good advantage. So that now the only poets using workers' slogans unintelligently in their verse are the very young ones who are still grappling with the problems we solved several years ago. But when I referred to the danger of sloganizing I meant not the use of widely known slogans which are the property—almost the new folk-lore—of an entire class, such as "Free Tom Mooney and the Scottsboro boys!"* I meant, rather, the use of a startling, sloganized line, badly thought through and used for its effect rather than for its truth, such as Alfred Hayes' closing line in *To Otto Bauer*:

> "They marched forth Social-Democrats but Bolsheviks
> they died!"

Such a line, describing the Austrian workers' February uprising, is not only untrue, but it is too neat, too slick, too superficially plausible to do anything except mar an otherwise good poem.

In connection with Hayes' poems, another dangerous tendency in current revolutionary verse occurs to me: the tendency to substitute superficial excitement of word and phrase for the deeper, quieter intensity of true emotional development. For example, the lines

> "Under our quiet hat
> The mind flames scarlet with a sudden heat,
> We burn secretly and sweet . . ."

seems to me to be verbal, superficial excitement, whereas the following lines, essentially about the same figure—the young, brooding, workless,

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uprooted man of today—have a quieter, deeper, truer emotional ring:

> "Tormented by the world and his desires,
> He dreams upon the lips he kisses
> And the dreams are lies . . ."

The first quotation is from Hayes' *Underground;* the second from Charles Henry Newman's *Uprooted.* A more complete examination of the two poems will further illustrate the difference between internal emotional development of theme, and verbal pyrotechnics which, no matter how brilliant, distract the reader's attention from the more emotionally authentic sections of a deeply-felt and honestly-conceived poem.

Other faults of current revolutionary poetry, such as false, superimposed simplification, insufficient variety in verse-forms, and political rather than poetic development of theme, should be mentioned. Each of these faults deserves a complete essay for itself. My purpose in mentioning them is mainly to stimulate discussion among poets and critics of poetry, as well as among interested readers. To treat them fully here would extend this paper far beyond its practical limits.

Let us assume, then, that poets, recognizing the faults in their work which have been alluded to in this discussion, will attempt to remedy and to eliminate them. What course will revolutionary poetry in this country follow in the future? A few pertinent suggestions are in order.

Firstly, it must be stressed that American poets have not yet begun to express the real tang and intonation, the real idiom, of American language. We have left unexplored the lives, habits and customs of our own workingmen, as expressed not only in their ideology—or the ideology of the most class conscious workers—but in their very speech. Who among the American revolutionary poets has had the insight or the courage to use the American lingo as C. Day Lewis uses the British vernacular? Who in America has written lines like

> "As for you, Bimbo, take off that false face!
> You've ceased to be funny, you're in disgrace.
> You can see the spy through that painted grin;
> You may talk patriotic but you can't take us in."

What I am suggesting here has been proposed very frequently in the past, but by the too-generalized slogan, "Go out among the masses." Yes, by all means go out among the masses, but bring back from your contact with them the results of your immersion in their activities and lives, their speech and habits, the real stuff of poetry.

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* This slogan, as well as many others, has a chanting, musical, poetic quatity which could very easily be adapted to poetry.

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Secondly, too many American poets have acquired less than the best from Eliot and Pound, from the Imagists, from all the influential schools and sources of modern poetry. We have adapted the lean, nervous rhythms; we have taken the understatement, the cryptic, obscure manners of writing. And in doing this we have forgotten an earlier, more fertile tradition in poetry: the use of direct, didactic statement in verse. Again C. Day Lewis can be quoted with value:

> "You above all who have come to the far end, victims
> Of a run-down machine, who can bear it no longer;
> Whether in easy chairs chafing at impotence
> Or against hunger, bullies and spies preserving
> The nerve for action, the spark of indignation——
> Need fight in the dark no more, you know your enemies.
> You shall be leaders when zero hour is signalled,
> Wielders of power and welders of a new world."

or:

> "They that take the bribe shall perish by the bribe,
> Dying of dry rot, ending in asylums,
> A curse to children, a charge on the state.
> But still their fears and frenzies infect us;
> Drug nor isolation will cure this cancer:
> It is now or never, the hour of the knife,
> The break with the past, the major operation."

I suggest to the revolutionary poet the possibility of writing didactic verse as *one* of the means by which he can solve his present difficulties. There are many others, to be sure: each dependant upon the individual predilections and abilities of each poet. The poet who is "up against it" can find in Day Lewis a good teacher. The success of didactic verse depends, of course, more on the poet's talent than on his method. Mere stripped didactic statement is not poetry. But if the poet has, in addition to the revolutionary themes and enthusiasm, which are admirably suited for this type of poetry, the lyrical and dramatic talent which elevate his work to the level of poetry, he can travel far. His success or failure will depend ultimately on his individual talent, which is unpredictable.

Finally, I would urge all revolutionary poets and students of poetry always to remember, when they are writing, that they are poets, not public speakers, nor lecturers, nor journalists. What they write must emerge as poetry. Otherwise, no matter how true the statement or incisive the observation, their work will be a failure. They might also bear in mind that, as Malraux has recently written, "between a literature and a doctrine, there is always a civilization of living men."

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DISCUSSION

Isidor Schneider:

Influences: I am puzzled by the omission of E. E. Cummings in the list of influencing poets. Kreymborg and Bodenheim also had more influence on the course of the contemporary poets than the article would indicate.

Poets: The work of H. H. Lewis has a decided place in revolutionary poetry. He is spontaneous, his range is common experience and he has an unusual talent for literary invective.

Status of Poetry: This may have been omitted from the discussion because it would require extensive treatment and another article—the question why, with the development of bourgeois power prose displaced poetry as the major literary vehicle. My feeling is that poetry is essentially a social art. Much of it is associated with expression in public, with choral singing, drama, declamation. The use of poetry in agitation is already frequent in the socially-orientated revolutionary movement. In poetic drama, and in poetic narrative characters tend to be social symbols. Prose, on the other hand, which can more readily be enjoyed by the individual reader, worked out better for the expression of bourgeois individualism. The novel with its isolation of the hero was the mirror of the individual. The poets, forced to write prose, have given poetic qualities and moods to much of prose. Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, George Meredith, Emily Bronte are examples. The universality of certain novels is often the symbolism of the poet breaking through. On the other hand, poetry trying to imitate and go beyond prose in the race to express individualism, often succeeded in recent times in falsifying its function. By all this I do not mean to infer that prose will not be a social art; I am convinced that it will. But I want to indicate that poetry, by its very structure, has been and will again be a social art and that the present disbalance between poetry and prose will be corrected in a society of socialized individuals.

Problem of Audience: The difference between the bourgeois audience and the proletarian audience, the bourgeois response and the proletarian response should be emphasized. The bourgeoisie wants to be distracted, the proletariat instructed and inspired. In the bourgeois audience-poet relationship the poet feels no responsibility except to his own artistic conscience, and usually despises his audience; the auditor feels no responsibility at all and looks at the author as a paid performer. The relationship has the impersonality and even hostility of the commercial transaction. In the proletarian audience-poet relation the responsibility of the poet is to his artistic conscience, to his audience and to his sense of their union, and

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the responsibility of the auditor is to his own function in the revolutionary movement, to his unity with the poet in that movement. The relationship is that of participation. Such a relationship is of the profoundest value to the poet, and this changed atmosphere for the poet is certain to be a great stimulus.

Problem of Subject: The content of revolutionary poetry, it should be emphasized, is limitless. It was in bourgeois art that the feeling existed that glory had departed from the world, that subjects had been used up, that there was nothing left but to play with forms. Revolutionary poetry restores the sense of glory. In the new light of Marxism the world lies before us to be rediscovered, everything in it to be found new and remarkable.

Problem of Structure: The greatest lack, to my mind, in today's revolutionary verse, is structure. Partly as a result of the disintegration of form, partly as a result of the influence of De Gourmont's dissociation of ideas, and Joyce's stream of consciousness, the poetic unit has become the line—in some cases the syllable—rather than the stanza. An outstanding traditional characteristic of poetry is that it is an art of form and if it abandons form it blurs its character. In even some of the best revolutionary poems recently produced it would be possible to divide a poem into three parts, rearrange the parts, and not affect the structure any. Such amorphousness leads to dullness, to the din made by having a clamor in every line, to the lack of climaxes, to short-circuiting communication, and therefore to ineffectiveness. The formal quality is especially important to poetry because poetry is a social art.

Revolutionary Tradition: It needs to be stressed that poetry even before the war was insurgent. Poetry was dissatisfied with its status; in revolt against the life around it. Poetry wanted an audience, a pleasant life, a decent social setting. Capitalist society does not satisfy these wants. There was no acceptance of life—only dissent in one form or another—in grim satire as in Masters, in a secession from society—physically in immigration, intellectually in obscurities intelligible only to choice spirits. When the crisis, and the feeble and reactionary capitalist way of meeting the crisis was revealed, then many of the dissenting poets realized where, alone, their dissent could become effective.

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Alfred Hayes:

I gather from Edwin Rolfe's article that the decisive milestones in his development as a revolutionary poet were the illuminating "talks" he quotes with Joseph Freeman. These "talks" seem to have been of an extraordinary character since following them, Rolfe says, "revolutionary poetry began to emerge as a conscious art, well on its path to maturity." What Freeman set as an axiom of our poetry: "Remember you are revolutionary poets. Then work hard at your poetry. The rest will follow" is, of course, correct. But it appears as though the "rest" did not follow quite as simply as it should have. "Serious shortcomings" have arisen. Our poetry is at a "standstill." We are guilty of "formula-writing", etc. Are we to assume that there was a lapse in memory perhaps to account for the lapse in poetry? Or that Maddow, Fearing, Rukeyser and the others, with the exception of Rolfe, somehow missed up on these talks and left to their own solitary devices became subject to these "shortcomings"? And if these "talks" produced so excellent a result that first time, what has prevented Comrade Rolfe from further "talks" with Comrade Freeman? Perhaps that is what we need to "cure" us, a good "talk."

On the score of my own poems, I would like to ask certain questions the criticism raises.

I am told that my verse is sometimes "didactic," and therefore fails. Yet Rolfe suggests, as one of his "cures," the "possibility of writing didactic verse as one of the means" to solve our present difficulties.

I am told that I use a "startling, sloganized line, badly thought through, and used for its effect rather than its truth." It may be that the line quoted is poetically bad, but surely it is not "untrue." Surely the events in Austria did precipitate a crisis in Social-Democracy, did begin its break-up, and herald the coming of a new ideology, a Bolshevik one, among the Vienna workers. Or does Comrade Rolfe contend that the February uprising caused no political change among the workers? That Otto Bauer remained the same to the workers after as before February?

I am told that a "quieter, deeper, truer" emotion in a poem is "authentic" and "honestly-conceived" while "verbal pyrotechnics" is the implied opposite. Assuming that the line is "verbal pyrotchnics," I am not aware that this constitutes a poetic failing. There are many poets (some are Rolfe's own favorites: Crane, Hopkins, Auden, Lewis) all guilty of "verbal pyrotechnics," yet Rolfe would hesitate to apply his generalization to them.

What I object to principally in Rolfe's criticism is the use of uncritical terms and words, "slick, neat, superficially exciting" as critical definitions and generalizations. They are so obviously expressions of a

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personal taste in literature, so obviously part of a particular, personal sensibility, that their actual critical value is meagre.

It seems to me, that while Rolfe announced that he would discuss certain "tendencies," he failed to do this and substituted instead a legend of personal tastes and discipleships. It so happens that the majority of the poets writing today have not been influenced primarily by Freeman, Gold or Gregory. Perhaps they should have been. Perhaps it would have been ideally better for them had they been, but as the case stands, they have not.

Crane, Eliot, Pound, have been some of the more directly traceable influences, but in general, it seems to me, it was not so much individual poets and poetic methods that were taken over by the poets, as general objectives and ambitions in the poetic atmosphere, charge, true, by the bourgois poets of the preceding generation. This, includes, not only the "masters," but the whole host of fugitive pieces which appeared in the little magazines, forgotten poems that in their mass represented definite poetic trends. This kinship with the past, I think, is traceable.

As far as I can see, and I have made, I confess, little effort to study the problem, this influence may be divided into two general categories: the technical mannerisms and the cultural mannerisms. The first has produced different effects and results in different poets. In Maddow, for example, I think we have evidence of a sincere effort to apply one principle of poetic construction in greater degree than it has been done before: a concentration of expression. Language, image, and event, in Maddow's poems, are compressed under a pressure few poets have dared to exert. The result, to me, has been a power of diction and an originality of image that distinguishes him from the majority of younger poets writing today. At the same time, I feel a lack of dramatic progression and a certain stylization of emotion which tends to make the poem unreal by giving to the simplest kind of experience an intensity equal to the most complex.

In Fearing's poems, we have the development of a personal style and a personal approach whose origins and germs, I think, one can find in many poets of the twenties. But where they have simply hinted at the possibilities of using the popular ideals and slogans of the movietones and the pulp magazines, Fearing has taken this as the core of his work. The slang and idiom of our times, turned against itself, to reveal the defeat, the cant, the frustration and hypocrisy at the heart of our civilization, has been created into a gifted irony of high rank.

But while some have succeeded in transforming a mannerism into a personal genuine manner, others have not.

The cultural mannerism, on the other hand, I think the far more

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dangerous one. It expresses itself in those poets who have suddenly begun to shout "tradition! tradition!"

They appear to have become aware suddenly of five centuries of English verse and the enormity of the discovery threatens to overwhelm them. They wrap themselves in the togas of a classical scholarship, begin to bristle with Roman references, and evolve long epics on the spirit of man marching toward a nebulous but brightly shining dawn.

They even threaten to outdo the Chinese in their hunt for "ancestors," literary and cultural ghosts who are called upon to support a feeble rhetoric .

They threaten to become like the woman whose husband died and went to Heaven, where, lonely, he pleaded with the Deity to haul the wife up too. The Deity consented, the angel descended to earth, but the wife demurred. On earth, she had a house and although it was weather-beaten and old she was attached to it. She had a pig-sty and although the pigs were scrawny and the trough smelled up the country-side, she was fond of it. She had a bit of ground and although it was barren, she was used to walking it. She would go to Heaven, the wise said, only if the house and the pig-sty and the ground went with her. So the angel transported all. And then the wife was happy in Heaven, for it was like the earth she had always known, as vile, as old, as barren, as ever.

I would like to see a different Heaven, new, free and confident, where all the revolutionary poets would sit and sing with untraditional angels.

Stanley Burnshaw:

Rolfe's attempt to straighten up the house of poetry has brought more confusion than order. His comment on the poets of the still-born 1912 renascence are misleading because they derive from his hasty telescoping of essentially disparate strains. This method, which involves so many central omissions that distinctions are blurred, succeeds only in vulgarizing. For example, to lump Frost with the Benets, Sandburg with Robinson is to misrepresent the individual significance of these poets in a manner which destroys meaning. And the strong, clear proletarian strain underlying much of Sandburg's work—how is it related to the last-stronghold-of-New-England anarchic mysticism of Robert Frost? To group poets together because their fertile period is over is a mechanical device entitled to no place in a critique presuming to order the disparate strains in a body of work which marked a sure gain beyond the poetic junk-standard of the 1890-1910s.

The source of Rolfe's difficulty, it seems to me, lies in the time-lens through which he looks at his material. Thus, Sandburg, Frost, the Benets,

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Robinson, Masters are seen as one not because their work carries a fundamental all-subsuming kinship but because they happen to be producing little new poetry during a specified calendar-period. Amy Lowell, Elinor Wylie and Vachel Lindsay—a curious ménage à trois—are compelled to reside in a common grave because they are dead. In his approach to current revolutionary poets Rolfe uses the same time-lens; only this time its diaphragm blacks out all poets except those who "are continually productive" during the current twelve-month or so.

Such a primarily fiscal view of creative produce is a peril to our literature as a whole. Not only is its use of a time-gauge obviously un-Marxian: its method is predicated upon a basic misrepresentation of the creative process. Particularly is such a time-view impossible when approaching current revolutionary verse—a movement which did not suddenly spring from the calendar at a certain year in the third decade of the current century but grew out of roots interwoven deeply in the whole organism of American literature.

If it did not result in bizarre distortions this method would not be worth examining. The unhealthy tone of the article as a whole might discourage serious reading; but one may at least choose to believe that its offensiveness is not conscious but the logical outgrowth of his method. Let us take a single example. Alfred Kreymborg is brushed aside entirely except for his *America, America* which, we are told, is "a much overrated piece of verse." This reminds one of the late-lamented review of Kreymborg's *The Little World* in which Herman Spector urged the poet to attend the Workers' School, for both critics ignore the totality of Kreymborg's work which has carried a deep proletarian strain for a full twenty years. Out of the literal confusion of many elements, Kreymborg has gradually neared a clear revolutionary position; *America, America* is the latest stage in this leftward movement. And how on earth does Rolfe know that Kreymborg has not written a hundred poems like *America, America* during the last year—poems which may have been offered and rejected or merely kept unpublished—poems which continue his proletarian evolution? Can a Marxist critic dare to lop off a given year in a writer's career and judge thereby the writer's potential fertility? Has this even the remotest connection to a dialectical method? And how would Rolfe explain the contradiction in his characterization of *America, America*—a "much overrated piece of verse" which has caught fire with revolutionary dramatic groups all over the country, which has had an influence on poetry and theatre-audiences exerted by no other piece of verse in our period?

Rolfe's fiscal view of our poetry forces him into a general distortion of the situation, for one cannot even begin to understand revolutionary literature except as a totality over a considerable period of time. It is not

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surprising, therefore, that Rolfe's article misses the one, glaring failure from which nearly all of the fertile poets suffer: failure to control poetic form. His omission is the concomitant of his belief that there isn't enough revolutionary verse being written. But as a matter of fact there is a great deal being written—and most of it by the very poets whose failings in form permit them to turn out poem after poem most of them sagging with weary passages, tottering under the weight of lines which any self-criticism execrates at once—until the total number of square inches of verse stretches to mad proportions.

I believe that the worthlessness of much of our verse—its flaccid passages and too-frequent dreariness—can be traced to this special overproduction. And this overproduction of mediocre work arises from two things: (1) most of our younger poets are crippled by influences. Their poems are often rigged into devices which fail to hide the fact that they are mutilations pieced together out of Hart Crane, MacLeish, Horace Gregory, Pound, etc. (2) Many of our fertile poets either eschew self-criticism or lack the ability to revise. The consequent formlessness is ruining most of the work of such talents as Hayes', Rolfe's and Muriel Rukeyser's.

Despite the proprietory use of the "we" in Rolfe's article, it is from other writers that we have so far gained the bulk of our best verse. Fearing, Kalar, Charles Henry Newman, etc., may appear sterile alongside the school of fecundity; but there is no reason to believe they are thereby less important, or that their powers are drying up. Revolutionary poetry does not depend on work published during a given calendar-interval: it depends on the totality of each individual poet's work and the totality of their combined product . . . totality not in number of lines but in perceptive precision, inevitability of form, emotional power—memorableness.

No speculation on our poetry can be considered anything but arbitrary if it omits the whole configuration of revolutionary strains rising in all sections of the country. The Negro poets—Langston Hughes, Richard Wright; H. H. Lewis, Don West; Kenneth Patchen, Willard Maas, James Daly and a dozen more. Out of the mass of young poets there is none whose achievement lifts him perceptibly above the rest. Much more reasonable, is the belief that our poetry will not be the product of one or two writers of consummate power but rather of a score of smaller poets—poets who in one or two poems catch and fix memorably the stuff of poetry, failing in their other attempts. We may find that our poetry will not produce one or two towering books but a fat anthology enclosing the rich, various strains of a collective work. Some contributions to this anthology have already been made, by Fearing, Gold, Kalar, Schneider, etc. We will continue to need the corrective needed right now: not necessarily a greater quantity of verse, but fewer and better poems.

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Ruth Lechlitner:

We who have read Edwin Rolfe's article will doubtless agree that he has set down, in able fashion, the aims and accomplishments to date of our revolutionary poets. We may also agree with his enumeration of their shortcomings. But I believe the reasons he gives for these shortcomings tell only half the story. Unless we can go a little more deeply into the causes for failure, it will be hard to attempt to shape the future course of revolutionary poetry in this country.

Why do these poets, in the main, produce work that is static, fragmentary, repetional, superficial? Why do they reflect a narrowly individual, bodyless and temporal concern with separate, isolated cases and happenings? Because there is little evidence that more than a few have taken the time to think through to a conception of the thing that lies behind, that has given rise—as but one of its manifestations—to their subject matter: the present revolutionary movement. Some poets, unfortunately, have so glibly adopted, parrot-fashion, even the most superficial clichés that one suspects they have become "revolutionary" because that happens to be (as they see it) the thing to do just now. Of those whose intentions are sincere, who feel an honest compulsion to interpret a struggle with which they are in sympathy, many have mentioned (with rather vague gestures) such matters as social change, the downfall of capitalism, mass action, Marxism. And one wonders: do they actually know what it is all about? Are they evaluating a revolutionary subject, seeing it in its perspective-relation to a great and ceaselessly flowing evolutionary scheme?

Change, we know, is the cardinal principle of life. Hegel saw the history of the world as a history of ideas, in which each idea has its own negation. Out of the conflict of these two opposing forces a new and higher idea rises, creates another negation, is in turn fought and conquered. Upon this Hegelian concept Marx based his theory of mass movement, with its illustration in the present system: one ruling class (the capitalist) creates its opposition (the proletariat) which in turn must inevitably rise to a ruling position. But that is not the end. The process of social flow is continuous. For instance, the establishment of a classless society Marx saw not as a final Utopia, but as the beginning only of new forms of society. This social-evolutionary process, built upon mutations, is as remorseless and certain as the processes of physical evolution in nature. Each change is brought about by the unrest and revolt of those at the bottom of the scale. They generate the upswing toward social betterment; and in each of these upward struggles something (apart from temporary victory) is created, we hope, that adds to the sum-total of human achievement.

It is assumed, of course, that the clear-seeing poet takes his stand

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with the upswinging group of his time. But the revolutionary poet who fails to keep in mind a concept of the force that transcends—as it controls and directs—the movement with which he is concerned, is as rudderless as the nature poet who attempts to describe a tree or a flower, per se, without recognizing and placing in relation to his object the fact of physical evolution. There is no reason, by the way, why the nature poet should be scorned by the revolutionary poet. Each, however, to be significant, must observe the laws and processes that govern his specific world; and there is a direct analogy and interplay between the two that neither should neglect

With all due respect for Mr. Rolfe's anxiety over the need of guides and teachers for the young revolutionary poet, there is little, it seems to me, apart from form, that can actually be taught. Who, for example, were Whitman's teachers? Whitman understood the immediate problems of his day; but he saw also above and beyond them, finding a symbolical significance in the force actuating a group movement that is as true and applicable to our time as to his. The position of most of our revolutionary poets is similar to that of Whittier who, as compared to Whitman's larger view, found a subject in his concern for the abolition of slavery. The Whittiers, of course, play a necessary part. A practical grasp of problems calling for present solution is important. But if a poet is to leave more than a "fragmentary mark" on his time, he must have a more embracing conception that may act as a standard or guide by which to measure his themes. If he has this, his tendency toward what Mr. Rolfe calls "formula" writing, with its static ideas and red-flag waving wind-ups, will disappear.

To establish "identification with the masses" is good enough advice. At the same time it is essential to substitute for the sentimental close-up—the hangover of the "I" participation—a rational objective if there is to be an expression of collective consciousness rather than of diverse, conflicting individual viewpoints.

What I have said is obviously subject to the criticism of any generalization. I have mentioned no contemporary revolutionary poet in particular, partly because Mr. Rolfe has discussed them individually and consistently; more pertinently because the points I have suggested apply, with few exceptions, to each of our poets. Aside from the problem of the form his work should take, I would suggest in summary to the young revolutionary poet this: think first; use the findings of philosophy, history, science as body and background for your own perceptions; learn that separate persons, objects, or places as subject have no significance except as related to the force that has brought them into being; finally, don't exploit your subject for all it is worth: bring something of rational and vital worth to it.

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REVOLUTION AND THE INDIVIDUAL WRITER

Horace Gregory

I suppose it is inevitable that my further discussion of Revolution and the Individual Writer should be in the nature of a rebuttal to the essays which followed my personal statement in *The New Masses*. I know that superficially my "position" has in it glaring contradictions—questions which, I think, are not merely personal but contain some relevance to all of us concerned with bringing into being a new order of human existence in America. As I see it the only way to answer these questions is to speak of them frankly and I am grateful to Edwin Seaver and Meridel Le Sueur for their willingness to present points of view that seem at variance with mine.

Te central point of difference in these three preliminary discussions arose over my use of the word "objectivity." I was the first to use the word, a dangerous word in this connection, yet it expresses with greater accuracy than any other the particular problem I had in mind. First of all, let me eliminate the more obvious misunderstanding of my use of the word. I don't mean politically "objective"; I don't mean that I belong to the "Objectivist" school of poetry, which, after all, is merely an extension of the "Imagist" Movement, now long dead, into the nineteen thirties. Nor do I mean that a writer can free himself of an emotional bias. What I am trying to describe is something that my friend Louis Grudin calls a "filter" through which a writer "sees" his world; it is his "style," his "medium," and in my case, it happens to be a particular kind of poetry.

Let us magine that the "filter" is actually a screen, something that has a frame around it. Let us call that screen the writer's "medium" and call the entire apparatus a "frame of reference." The living man has a number of "frames of reference." These are neither separate, nor do they coincide. When a man eats, he may be thinking of work he has to do. He may solve a "problem" at the breakfast table. Should his thinking become too intense he will stop eating. The action may be reversed; if the man is very hungry, he will be able to "think" of nothing but the food that is placed before him. Either of these extremes is definitely abnormal. When a man can see no more than food before him he is either

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starved to stupefaction or should be sent to Bellevue. The reversal of this action, or "thinking of his work" is also a momentary aberration.

The frame of reference cannot be made to coincide with any other frame of reference, nor can it exist as a separate entity; it would be like talking about "pure" poetry, "pure" eating, "pure" economics, "pure" politics, or "pure" anything else.

The point I wish to make is this: *that the act of writing is a frame of reference,* that by its very definition it has a different set of laws than those which govern other activities, that different kinds of writing have different sets of standards by which we judge the intention of the writer, but we must not confuse the standards.

Because of the subtle confusion of all these points in the discussion raised by Edwin Seaver and Meridel Le Sueur I believe them to be far more confused (in this respect) than I am.

I doubt if Marx dropped into like confusion when he appraised and defended Heine; I doubt if Lenin in reading Pushkin or the Latin Classics felt he was wasting time. I would say that both Marx and Lenin made allowances for translation of one kind of action into another; to apply the logic of a poem by Heine directly and literally into terms of political action is, I think, insanity—though the "content" of the poem may be as "revolutionary" as you please. Yet it is precisely that kind of confusion that takes place when Mr. Seaver speaks of Lenin as "the poet of action." If he means that Lenin's action was like in *quality* to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* I agree, but if he implies, as I think he does, a likeness in *kind,* I say that he is walking into the same confusion that Granville Hicks ran into when he warned readers of *The New Masses* against Marcel Proust.

Another illustration of my point is contained in Kenneth Fearing's poem, *Cultural Notes.* Fearing, from the very start of his career, has been revolutionary in his intentions; so far as I know, the Communist Party and the activity surrounding it, has always been the source of his material. Lately, as Edwin Rolfe says in his essay on revolutionary poetry in this issue of *Partisan Review,* Fearing's new work has proved the value of this close association, yet he saw clearly enough the very problem I have in mind and he stated it from a number of different points of view in this single poem:

Professor Burke's symphony "Colorado Vistas"
In four movements,
I Mountains,
II Canyons
III Dusk

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IV Dawn
Was played recently by the Philharmonic.
Snap-shots of the localities described in music were passed around.
All O. K.
After the Performance Maurice Epstein, twenty-nine, tuberculosis,
Stoker on the S.S. Tarboy,
Rose to his feet and shouted:
"He's crazy! Them artists are all crazy,
I can prove it by Max Nordau,
They poison the minds of young girls."
Otto Svoboda, 500 *Avenue A, butcher, Pole, husband, philosopher,*
Argued in rebuttals "Shut your trap, you!
The question is, does the symphony fit in with Karl Marx?"
At the Friday evening meeting of the Browning Writing League
Mrs. Whittamore Ralston-Beckett, traveler, lecturer, novelist, critic,
poet, playwright, editor, mother, idealist,
Fascinated her audience in a brief talk whimsical and caustic
Appealing to the younger generation to take a brighter, happier, more
sunny and less morbid
View of life's unchanging fundamentals.
Mrs. Ralston-Beckett quoted Sir Horace Bennet. "O Beauty," she said,
"Take your finger off my throat, take your elbow out of my eye,
Take your sorrow off my sorrow,
Take your hat, take your gloves, take your feet down off the table,
Take your beauty off my beauty, and go."
After the performance Maurice Epstein, twenty-nine, tuberculosis,
Stoker on the S.S. Tarboy,
Kicked to his feet and screamed:
"She's crazy! Them artists are all crazy!
I can prove it by Max Nordau
They poison the minds of young girls."
Otto Svoboda, butcher, Pole, husband, philosopher,
Spoke in reply: "Shut your trap, you!
The question is, what about Karl Marx?"

The writing of this poem does not mean that Fearing is a "bad" revolutionary poet; he is merely choosing, for the moment, to look through his particular "screen" at different sets of values, taking his value as a writer, as an "observer" for a measurement of other values. Does this poem mean that Fearing insists upon "art for art's sake?" Decidedly not. The very content of the poem and the kind of observation that it makes denies the so-called "ivory tower." And incidentally its humour

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and the engaging personality behind it, its alertness are of value to everyone who reads it. The exprience in the poem is common to everyone who has overheard an argument over esthetic problems, and what it has to say should be remembered by all of us.

In speaking of my "objectivity" Miss Le Sueur feels, I think, that I am too insistent upon keeping a clear head, that I am too intelligent, too aware of the many forces at work around me, that I can't be trusted because I don't jump into a hog wallow of "faith" and then go through some mysterious process of rebirth. I don't happen to see my writing, nor my entire set of beliefs in terms of sexual symbolism, nor am I attracted by the prospect of going blind merely because I see the hope of a new social order. What is more, I don't think of Communism as a mere hope, but as a well organized society, a reaffirmation in Marxian terms of what was once called "the brotherhood of man." I believe that there is a human moral force behind the entire movement, and the act of closing my eyes would make me something less than human.

As I read part of this discussion aloud at The John Reed Club, someone from the audience wanted to know why I spoke of my own poetry and my belief "so coldly"; wasn't my poetry my mistress? If one loved one's mistress, one was blind . . . The argument was much like Miss Le Sueur's.

For my part, I have a healthy prejudice against a conception of writing (or any kind of action) that may be described in such terms. When I write I hope I am not going to a prostitute, nor do I conceive of myself as a camp follower and a prostitute if I happen to receive pay for what I write. Nor do I believe that each step in the evolution of a writer is a process of being reborn, or that every time a book is written the author makes some mysterious contact with a "great mother." As a matter of fact, if I went through a process of rebirth every time I arrived at a conclusion, I'd begin to doubt the validity of all past experience which brought me to the conclusion I just made. That doubt would certainly modify my faith in the conclusion itself. With the precedent of being reborn established, I could jump into "Marxism" as I might jump into a tub of warm water in the hopes of being rejuvenated. Then when the water had cooled a bit, I could jump into another tub, perhaps Huey Long's Share The Wealth Plan. Being blind and guided by faith, it wouldn't matter which tub I'd jump into next. As long as I kept on jumping and going through the delightful process of being reborn, I could land with Major Douglas in a good hot tub of Social Credit and be another Horace Gregory. The process is both too agonizing and too easy.

I think that in all forms of activity (writing included) certain responsibilities are incurred, and even at the cost of seeming inconsistant,

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those responsibilities should carry a man from one stage of his development to the next, particularly if his convictions tend in the direction of Communism which is in itself a moral ordering of society.

A writer, in reproducing the pattern of his life through a special medium, reveals a number of seeming inconstancies, a fact that has been noted by Whitman, and one reason why I think that Gorky is not a member of the Communist Party. Gorky has kept his "frames of reference" clear of confusion; again, they are not separate, nor do they coincide; they are normal, but his "frame of reference" as a writer is of first consideration, and because he has recognized this fact, his value to the Party has its value in proportion to his ability as a writer.

This brings me to the point of another common confusion in the definition of revolutionary literature. This confusion is one that rises to the surface frequently in the critical section of *The New Masses*. It appears in Miss Le Sueur's essay when she says that she too has been trying to write poetry. I have not seen any verse written by Miss Le Sueur; I had always supposed that she was an able journalist whose writing contained an interesting variety of emotional conflicts. I remember one admirable sketch that was included in an anthology of journalistic prose issued by *Scribner's*. Miss Le Sueur hints something of sacrifice in the kind of writing that she is doing now. Isn't she doing her best work now? Is there anything in the character of her beliefs that would prevent her from doing her very best? I think not. But her question may be divided into two sections.

The first is a confusion of terms between literature and journalism. This is a problem inherited from Russia. Following the revolution, the U.S.S.R. had few if any good journalists. I doubt if Russia had any good journalists before the revolution; I mean journalists in the sense that H. G. Wells or Walter Duranty or Louis Fischer, or Maurice Hindus are journalists. Journalists had to be created overnight and

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* John Strachey's value to the Communist Party in England and America rests upon a threefold premise:

1). That he has an intelligent, open-eyed faith in Marxist ideology. He understands not merely the implications of Marxism, but also the dangers inmplicit in Capitalist society and in the philosophy of Parreto. He uses Marxism as an instrument of thinking.

2). That he is both a good journalist and an effective economist. He has combined these talents and made them his "medium." If he were an ineffectual economist-journalist, his Marxian convictions would remain an inarticulate virtue.

3). He is not a member of the Communist Party. His activity is of a particular kind. Though being a member of the Party would not necessarily limit his virtues he has chosen to remain outside a field of activity where his particular talents would not function.

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"publicity" men, men like Ivy Lee, had to spring out of nowhere. Men had to be told what to write and how to write. A large organization had to be built up out of nothing; it was a start from scratch, from the very bottom. The antiquated order gave way—the rotted fabric of whatever was called journalism in old Russia went under, and new men, writers with a technic not un-American, came into being. These men were measured by standards of journalism, and had no pretentions of being more than what they were, nor less than what they were. But one can't judge their work by the same standards used for Gorky or Tolstoy or Mayakovsky.

Let me repeat that again there is a difference in *kind;* the logic of a news story is quite different from that of a poem or a play or a novel. The standard is not higher or lower, but *different.* If a reporter is sent out to get a story about John D. Rockefeller and returns with a story on J. P. Morgan, no matter how well written the copy may be, the reporter deserves to be fired. He is not obeying orders from his city editor; he has violated one of the terms of his medium; and an inferior piece of prose as prose would be acceptable.

There is no such clear distinction being made between the function of journalism and novels, plays and poetry in *The New Masses.* It is forgotten that in America, in New York, one can find many examples of able journalism and that the business of training men to write good journalistic copy is relatively easy. The expert journalist, however, is always rare; but no matter how rare he may be his function differs sharply from that of the novelist or poet.

Since this distinction has never been made (I remember a long line of novels from *Generals Die In Bed* to *Parched Earth* all regarded as "literature" and not as fulfilling the offices of journalism which was their function in varying degrees) confusion in the status of a writer is still evident. Edwin Seaver's essay on Hery Roth's novel has done much toward clarifying a cloudy issue. Mr. Seaver is in a position to realize the problem from several point of view since he himself has written a sensitive novel and a few fine poems and has done much writing that is in the form of journalism.

I feel that this differentiation is not clear to Miss LeSueur, that she feels that she is now employed at an inferior kind of writing and that some kind of "sacrifice" is demanded of whatever talent she possesses. I have but to refer her to Edwin Rolfe's essay in this issue. I happen to know that Rolfe has been at work in various kinds of political activity but it has not prevented him from becoming a poet. Nor has such activity prevented Muriel Rukeyser from writing poetry; and I would say that an entire group of poets in England have been stimulated by the

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confidence they have gained from the very sources of Marxian beliefs.

I once heard of a man who said he "gave up" an advertising job for the sake of poetry. He said it with the air of making a great sacrifice. A few years later I heard of his "giving up" poetry for Communism—and the sacrifice (so I understood) was even greater. Now he has "given up" Communism for something else—and I suppose the sacrifice is so great that I shall never hear of him again.

I mistrust the entire idea of sacrifice for a "cause"; and I say this knowing well our present difficulties, knowing well that we cannot solve our problems today or the next day, knowing that many of us have personal adjustments to be made, no matter what we do. I think, however, that we should not state our position in terms of sacrifice. If we have courage, we should be glad to show it. After all we are making our choice with what I have always believed to be the actual tradition in literature. Writers will always prefer to use their own specific medium of action, which is a technic of language; though we may sometimes doubt its effectiveness when we compare it directly with other forms of action, I think we will always return to it and discuss its problems as I am now discussing the points raised in a controversy. Literature in its best sense is always related to the experience of living; and at this moment all of us are impelled by a force that is greater than ourselves. C. Day Lewis has called that force THE MAGNETIC MOUNTAIN.

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TAKE A NUMBER, TAKE A SEAT

J. S. Balch

TEN A. M. SCENE, the new charity-can, an old building, southeast corner of Fifteenth and Carr streets. No more Jewish Community Center, no more St. Vincent de Paul for Catholics, no more Provident Association for Protestants, no more nothing, it's all government now. Three weeks ago a guy comes up to the house. Madam, says he, and that's the first and last word he uses makes the old lady think she's still somebody. The rest of the spiel is to the effect that cash relief is out, it is grocery orders from now on, with Will you kindly designate which grocer you'd rather serve you, with Sign away your cut on the dotted line, with It's Washington, D. C. now. No more heart-to-heart talks with crocodiles of your own nationality and religion, it's bigleague stuff now, federal stuff. And the old lady is so scared with visions of Franklin D. looking down at her through layers and layers of space, through telescope and microscope, as it were, that she, so modest as I know she can be but mad too, and suffering from high bloodpressure and the knowledge that rent's due three months now and no more cash for groceries to pay rent bills with, tells this bird to go dig himself a grave, We will get through with God's help somehow.—So here am I, three weeks later, no job yet, neither any miracles, to kiss the rumps of those whom in these days we must.

So, through the portals, past where there should be but ain't a sign Abandon pride all ye who enter here, and this is Ellis Island all over again, there are long benches the north end of the hall, long benches the south end, and all of them crammed with clients, sweet Jesus, what a word! Negroes, Italians, Jews, Poles and Irish and plain native whites, no more sectarianism, see, you ketchem the Washingtonian point, yes? no more people put with their own religion, but all together now, together again. A new Democracy af Paupercracy, may teeth be broken saying this. And in between the two sections, the overseeresses, the lion-tameresses, the galley-mistresses, two identical-twin old

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spinsters, six foot tall if an inch, with identical grey hair and pince-nez and sharp hysterical noses and files arranged before them, cards itemizing your stakes in heaven and hell.

Fronting the twins, a line. At the end of this I take my stand. Up ahead, in female baritone first, in female soprano next, the words, the command incurious, the dogma unshakable, Take a number, take a seat. Men drop away to left and right, the line moves, I move, no matter how often it has happened to me, this coming to a place and an experience than which no whorehouse ever built can disgust me more, it is always new. Always the same, you see, yet not the same, always being eaten deeper, like rust slowly burning in the same iron in the same place. And I listen to the words up ahead Take a number, take a seat, trying to kid myself This don't apply to me, I got an appointment for ten o'clock, I waited three hours yesterday getting it. And pass the time wth What great material! thinking this, that and the other details now, the way the smoke curls up at the barny ceiling, the way that woman there, she sits like Mona Lisa only she never heard of Leonardo, so on, what great story-stuff this is now, criticizing in this manner, the trouble with Farrel's shortstories, those I've read, that is, there ain't none of his lumpens ever come in contact with social service, Conroy has nothing to say about this either, gloating, you see, in the beshat and wouldbe impersonal ways of some authors, over my humiliations and hurts, over my hungers and my people's, all in the name of this field's virginity and the worth of all this to me in the realm of stories yet to be written. Which is okey, I guess, only underneath all this, as the line moves, as I move, I pass the time in other ways, I *must,* I think Now the way to handle her is like this—planning, to say the least, to lick her butt with no less gusto than I would, say, be taking a good long walk through green grass along river's edge, The way to talk to her is—the imagination bitched-up but wistful and soaring nevertheless, visions of groceries, sweet groceries, to follow, and—aw! aw! let the priest spit on his tail three times and die of it, here I am, at last, the steel lips open. I try to beat her to it. I have an appointment with—. No go.

Take a number, take a seat.

You don't understand. (Ha, ha, who don't?) I have an app—

It is incredible. It is unbelievable. If I did not see it, would not believe it. The sparse eyes narrow, the steel mouth

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tightens, the syllables—sharp and petulant before—grow long and beginning high go higher, ending in a shriek, Take a number, I will *not* talk with you, take a number, take—a—se-e-eat!

It is not only her voice, a blunt fork scratched across frypan bottoms, not only her bitchy face, her maniacal eyes. Am describing these to you, you see, because it's a pushover telling it this way, they're the things you see first. It's the thought, clear and ice-cold, oh what in hell is the use in arguing with her, what speech can there be between us. Not only her face, her voice, you see. —Back of this madness dance nightmares of parties I've attended, been drunk at sometimes, affairs my three-syllabled vocabulary and cockeyed authorship have given me open sesame to. At which social workers, young wenches out of college with theories, were present. With whom discussions, between drinks and gay talk and screws attempted or about to be, would start up. The wenches; *They*—meaning *us*—are deceitful and lying, ain't got no honor nor industry nor hope, they're filthy and no account, most of them, it'd be better to let them go to hell and forget them if it weren't for oh-what-a-bore-to-even-mention-it, our careers. Talking about us, you see, I, to my everlasting shame, bland and disguised.

Memories reinforced by other memories. Our last visitor. There is a word I love, I love it incestuously—visitor. This big-nose and laceblouse up at the house, the old lady ill as usual and inarticulate as to our wants as always, myself explaining If she had shoes now, she could go to the doctor. This because it was the visitor's belief that the old lady *should* go to the doctor's, Why didn't she! And warming up in my own wormfat, how much we got coming into the house and how much more than that should be going out if we had the money which we ain't. Then, think of it, the visitor on leaving telling us, no more words about the doctor now, mind you, no more words about the shoes, You should try to manage, you should try to get by, the important thing was not what their charity can salvage of our bodies, it was our self-respect which counted, our ability and willingness to solve our own problem. Only robbing's out, the river's out, turning radical's out, it's maybe the brave smile rainbowing through tears is what she's driving at. Memories before that even, memories I can't even remember now, hardening all the memories after, visitor after visitor, visitation after visitation, wenches, old, young, hairlipped, thinlipped and full-lipped, lippy bunches of charity-canned rules-and-regulations she-

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bastards playing strip-poker with our destinies, with How old are you, where were you born, why, how, who was your uncle, and Where was your uncle's uncle the night two other guys were at some other place?

God damn it, I holler, and her puss can't be uglier than how I feel, I tell you I have an appointment for ten o'clock!

And which, in answer to her rat-tat-tat Take a number, her maniacal Take a seat makes me take a number, 92, makes me take a seat, wandering blindly toward it, the mirthless and not unfriendly laughter of many witnesses in my ears, to be wedged between on the one side a fat sleeping woman, to the other side a young Italian, flat moonface with staring strangely from the middle of it, knifelike black diamond eyes, with whom in a while I enter into conversation.

Who's your visitor, says he.

Take a number, take a seat, the one twin hollers. Can't get away from it. Men and women, some hardfaced, some laughing with secret laughter in them stand about, crowd onto the ends of crowded benches, pushing those in the middle close. 45, the other twin hollers, 45 gets up and advances timidly fronting majesty, I hear the question, the frightened answer. Listen, lady, I need some coal, I figure 45 from 92 leaves 5 from 12 is 8, 5 from 9 is 4, I got 47 numbers to wait yet.

Who's your visitor? Moonface again. Come to look at him, he's a sweet looking thing. Curly hair, skinny shoulders. When he stands up to stretch, is short, and potbelly clowns his prettiness. Maybe he wants to gossip, why not.

Miss More, she has big feet, I tell him.—Was it yesterday, this place has got me goofy, was it six months ago, was it ever—yes, you fool, it was. I walked with my sweet Christina, it was a soft June night, she lived west of Kingsway and here it was only Grand and miles and miles of oh-may-they-never-finish miles to go yet, slow stars and white breasts and white arms so close to me, Oh you silly bastard, think I, talking to myself, looking at Moonface, she wanted to make a man of me maybe, in return for which she maybe, you guess the rest, So what did you have to go spouting about solidarity and oppression and what Gene Debs once said about he wasn't free while a single man was still in prison on a night like that for, aincha got no sense a-tall?

I'm from the eighth street districk, says Moonface, dis is my first time over here, I don't know who dere gonna give me.

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Yeah?—Christina and Moonface now, they ain't never met. Damn cute, the pictures bubble up in a joint like this, ain't they? Me and Moonface, don't know each other from Adam, me and him though, we're both in line, me 92, him 95. Christina, meet Moonface. Him and me's old pals, ain't met till this minute, but you'd be surprised how well we know each other's gizzards. And on the other hand, Moonface, meet my love, Christina. Oh my. O-o-oh my. Some fun, eh keed?

Lookit. My old lady is an old woman at the age of forty-four, worn out with doing the heavy wash and bearing four kids and during the war dodging zeppelin bombs in London and after the war years of starvation and hunger, my father went to work in sweatshops when he was twelve, he is a little man, he used to work all night under gaslight and he was not yet thirteen when he did this, my little sister now, we live in a house where in the wintertime there are icicles inside the walls and it's too cold even for rats and when it rains anytime, the rain comes through rotten roofs and we catch it in buckets till we fall asleep and in the morning the floors are swamps, if we don't move out soon the way the kid's coughing, but none of us are working and the old lady ain't even got shoes to go to the doctor, and all the people I know, all the people I have ever known, are twisted and warped by poverty, they know nothing of art and literature and how to order the headwaiter around because they never had time to think about anything but what to stop the cracks with, they never had time to grow tall and straight.

But why do you have to call yourself a *proletarian* writer, she said, aren't there other people in the world? You are young and you are enthusiastic, says she. You are under a sense of loyalty, says she, my life, my love, my almost-bride. You are in a phase, you will grow out of it, you are of superior protoplasm, et cetera, oh what stone from such soft lips, oh goddamit, before it is over I have thrown her tits away, the whole damn thing reminds me of a story my father once told me.

It was in London, he says, it was a long time ago, it was long before we came to America, it was likewise long before you were born, but I was already of a mind that the level of a workingman's life and the level of the gutter was of a height, do you understand my words, my son? Well, in this shop where I worked, a strike was brewing and there was a lad in the shop working with me, his name was Jonathan Pot, had no use for

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strikes. You're balmy if you go out, says he to me, this is a country where you're balmy indeed if you think one man's better than another. How do you reckon that, I asks. Why, the other day, says he, just to show you, I meets up with the King. He is coming down the lane, the King is, says Pot, there's a regiment of hussars ahead and a one of dragoons behind, and he is riding in a fine carriage, and here am I crossing the road, but a shirt to my back and that a dirty one, and he leans out the window and tells his footman to pull up the horses. And did he talk to you, says my father. You're bloody well right, says Pot, and he beams all over his face, that's what I mean when I say that in this country everybody's equal and one man's like another, not even the King is too proud to talk to me. And what does he say to you, says my father. What does he say, says Pot, and his face it is foolish and bright like a pan after scrubbing, he says to me, the King says, he says, says Pot, Gwan, Pot—*imagine* a King now not being too proud to talk to one like me—Gwan, Pot, he says, gwan home, you sonofabitch, git outa my blawsted way.

That's the story I tell her, not that it's right to the point but it's enough to the point so's my lady catches on, and I'm thinking about this, hearing the Take a number—, take a seat—gals, the windows are open, there's a mob of painters and plasterers outside, they are fixing up the joint, making it pretty-pretty, there's a young woman bigshot standing in the middle of the floor pointing out things to a young man bigshot, she is planning the joint, she has a look on her face like she is working in her private home, this is the kitchen, this is the bedroom, this is the dining room, she is going to make things nice and comfy in here, the benches are close-packed, you can smell your next to your next seat neighbor's armpits, we all are looking at the young woman on account of there's little else to look at, the smell of paint and wind driving through sunshine comes through the window, the Moonface bozo asks me a question.

I hope dey don't give me no woman visitor dis tims, he says, you tink dey will?

No kidding, like a cat's got a mouse, that's the way this place has got me.—Damfino, I tell him, damfino, I—oh, I dunno.

No kidding, this is the way it's got me. If I was running a grocery store or a confectionary store, if I had stayed in the furniture business goosing my way up, that's what my mother wanted me to do till I got a story published in a proletarian

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magazine and she knew I was gone for keeps, if I had gone into the trucking racket with my cousin, if even I was the sort of writer Harold Bell Wright is, Edgar Guest, for that matter, if I was a writer like O. O. McIntire or Hergesheimer or Cabell, *if*,—that's the way it's got me, you see, because what use have I for crap like that! What the hell, none of this is what I want, it's just this lousy dump, that's what's the matter with me, this joint makes me think of the old lady back home waiting for me to bring in the lousy grocery ticket, makes me think of the stale old joke, still good for an extra quiver, it seems, one boy does another boy a good deed. Says the first boy, Oh that's all right, when I'm old and grey and sixty, you can repay me with a nickel for a cup of coffee and, I'll be down on the corner next door to the Park Plaza Hotel when you roll by in your nineteen cylinder limousine. The trouble with me is, you see, I'm trying to stave off kissing my Visitation's arse, it's got me goofy.

We-e-ell, trying to scare up an answer, *which*, man or woman? thinking What the hell, ain't they all alike, thinking If I take the one side or the other, that's chauvinism, when whoa! who's this coming across the floor!—Excuse me, to Moonface, and up and in a flash I'm in front of her. She can't get away, she stops.

Hello, Miss More, I greet her. I was hoping you would come out.

You were? How nice, she tells me.—That's what she says but what she means is Nuts to you, on account of she knows that I know that she knows I know there's only one reason she popped out of her cubby-hole and it's plain law of average, phew! she had to come out sometime anyway. What can I do for you, Fred, says she.

Well, you see, I had an appointment yesterday to see you today at ten o'clock. It's eleven fifteen now, and—

Well, take a seat, Fred, I'll see what I can do.

Back to the galleys again. Moonface asks is she, and I say, yes, she is, that's the Girl of my Economic Dreams. Did you look at her feet, I ask him. He says No, he wasn't even looking at her puss. Which is a pity in a way, she has such big feet, so much bigger than the other big thing he was looking at. —Well, says he, what do you tink, don't you tink a man's better'n a woman?

Well, like I said before, I don't know. Sometimes he is,

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I guess, sometimes he ain't, it all depends on the individual.—That isn't what he means though. Well, what is he driving at?

We-ell, he thinks I'm dumb as hell, you can see it in his face, you take a woman now, suppose now she comes around to yuh house, see? She promises you dis, she promises you dat, den she don't come across. You kin chase her or you kin whistle. Wadya do?

I bite.

Nuttin. See, you don't do nuttin. She's a woman, see? Yuh can't hit no woman. A woman for a woman, dat's all right. But if yuhr a man, yuh can't hit no woman. See?

I ketchum.—Individual terrorism, thnk I. This is where if I were an organizer, I'd step in and tell him this, and no bones about it. I'd argue it out with him, patiently, point by point, I'd show him where he was all wrong in this, that one man can't do a thing by himself, that in solidarity only is strength, I'd end up by making him sign a Party application card. But I'm only a writer, I've got to do this my own goofy way, I look at his flat pancake face, the eyes like diamonds dug deep in it, I smell the crowd around us, I listen to the bitches shrilling at the prow, I think of myself, I begin to see a story.

Man, says Diamond-eyes, I lay awake dreaming of getting a man visitor. I cry nights tinking how lucky I'd be.

You ain't gonna get no man, I kid him, you're gonna get an old feeble woman with glasses. No kidding though, I like this guy. He's got what it takes to get going. That's the trouble with being a writer. You're inhibited, you don't think of beautiful things like that to do, you piss away your life trying to discover the exact adjective.

I wouldn't kill him, says Diamond-eyes, I don't tink I'd do dat, dere wouldn't be no sense in it, but I wouldn't give him no black eye, either. I'd really do a job on him, I'd break both his arms and legs, I'd put him in the hospital fuhr at least six months.

Yud get blacklisted, you know.

They just about got us that way now, says Diamond-eyes, aincha been around here long enough to know dat?

Yud go to jail too, juh know the prisoner's song?

Sure, yuh wanta hear it?—The way he figures it, he pops this guy, he goes to jail. He goes to jail, people get to hear about it. They get to hear about it, they know who's right. Just like that, snap.

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Suppose they don't get to hear about it, I ask him. He must think I don't know this is a democratic country, I can see it from the way he gives it to me, one syllable at a time.

Lookit. I smacks dis guy, see? Dey pulls me in, see? De judge, he asks me Whatcha do it fer, so I tells him. Dat's plain, ain't it?

Yeah, but suppose he don't ask yuh *why* you done it, suppose he just asks yuh *what* you done?

He gives it to me a different way.—Would I be putting a man in de hospital fuh nuttin? Hell, no. Den if de judge was fair, he'd pretty near *have* to be askin me why, ain't it?

Pass. So what?

So de reporters gits up offa dere cans and takes notice. Dey wanta know all about it, see? Dey wanta know de details, what's de name of dis lousy agency I'm talking about, what's wrong with it, how come wit all de cash dey got coming in dey don't dish nuttin out, all de dope, dey'd—

So, seeing this bozo is really serious, I'm just about to tell him I don't know about all that, it all depends on whether the papers would call this news, what with all the kidnap murder trials, prizefights, quintuplets being born, movie stars getting divorced, battleships being baptized going on, et cetera, when I hear my number, 92. Excuse me, I says, that's my number. And sidle up to majesty.

Take a seat, says she, what can I do for you?

Will you have a good look at a question like that, doesn't it make you laugh!—I'd like to see Miss More, I tell her, demure like I been stroked sixty times.

You can't see Miss More, says she, she's not in this morning. Her pencil begins to flicker invitingly across a pad of paper, she becomes even more damn anxious to know what she can do for me.

But I was talking to her just half an hour ago!—I give her the spiel same way Diamond-eyes give it to me, like it's just a matter of if she understands, then everything will be okey. With eyes agape like youthling manholes, She said for me to wait, I splutter, she said she'd see me!

You can't, she begins again—but what's the use of prolonging agony this way, the point is, she's right, I don't get to see Miss More, that's it in short. Pince-nez asks me my name, where I live, I tell her. She asks me is there something the matter with my grocery order, ain't I getting it, and I tell her

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No, there ain't nothing the matter with my grocery order, we refused to take the order three weeks ago so there can't be nothing wrong with us not getting it, and she writes that down too.

The reason I want to see Miss More, don't get me wrong, I tell her again, is about the groceries all right, but the main thing is, it's about a job.

Damn if she don't write that down too, in those words. She looks at me, you know the look, Everything will be a-a-all right. After all, says she, Who doesn't need a job?—She's talking to me like she thinks my pants is diapers, her hands spread in a Hollywood gesture. Who's got a job today anyway?

Well, you have, for one.

That finishes it. 93, she calls out, giving me a look which says You common bastard, what makes you think I'm in your class. And I'm halfway to the door when it occurs to me she ain't told me when it's coming, the mealticket.

Back to the execution block. Listen, I begin, when is—

Take a number, she hollers, take a seat!

Listen, I say, you don't get it, lady, I—

Take a number, take a se-e-eat!

Well, while it's true I got some inhibitions, I don't have the same ones my friend Diamond-eyes has. And mixing up my genders don't bother me none, either.—You goddam sonofabitch, I say, loudly and distinctly, and I walk out onto the street. And walk. And the sun's good. And think. Oh, the sons of bitches, oh the dirty bitches. A rhapsody less esthetic maybe than if it was a rhapsody to the moon, but so much more satisfying.

Okey, Diamond-eyes, says I, hope you get your man-visitation. Hope you kick him half to death. Hope you get a chance to tell your judge why you done it. Revolution's a big slow giant, he takes a lot of building. You do what you told me. You'll learn. I'll write me a story what happened this morning. We're both of us on our way.

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ACTS OF GOD

1. The Farm

Before morning the dark western valley of the continent,
the obscure Dakotas, Kansas, and the wheat-withering plains
dream the deep plush of rain on early fields, and when
the night like a tin reflector dewless has pivoted, wake at
sun: a hatred.

Their farmer scrapes with his hoe the uniform heaven: drought,
drought; dust boils to his shack on the noon-burned hillock.
No flowers. His starvelings stare by the twisted doorway; and
mother
grinds from the pump, while the hot nails start in the boards,
her few tears.

The beans counted on dry plate, the dole from the barrel's acrid
staves,
may God grace. Last week from black pasturage the cattle
stooped to
rasp the last mud; now between the dead horns sing
wild blue-green shiny flies; and gnawed bark cracks along
the dead tree tomorrow.

But open the air-cooled humidified the courteous doors
whereto the prosperous motors haul up linen paunches
at evening glad or sorry from the screeching Pit.
Wheat sharply up, chilled soup down; with shriveled beef,
waiter, the ices!

Puzzling by scanty lamp, dusty, sun-swollen, a man's
hands may turn furious and massacre a sheriff; therefore
at 9 P.M. let F. D.'s national smile be hooked
up coast to coast to offer across mahogany
cold cream gratis.

"Dear Mr. President: Out here we heard your kind voice
promising.
But August is bad in a mine town. Bread is high, meat not to
touch.

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Them the Co. evicted have no windows, or flowerpots to put
in them.
That one day a week my man finds work in the pits is like one
leg—
who can stand on it long?"

2. The Mine

Gleam on forehead, working the staggered day in the earth's
absolute evening, in the hot places or over the knee in icy rush,
cracking black from black while the battery jolts on the buttock.
Skinny rats attend at lunch, and—"Look't that big one!"—
writhing in a faint!

The child's scream, the rescuers masked, class-solid, the folk
watching into the earth. The young thigh of whose love
burns meanwhile in a splitting tunnel? What father drowns
in stone?
"The air-pump had T.B."? For whom, hoistable from deep
grave, prepare a shallower?

Just at lunch the life-thirsty carbon monoxide coughed,
from the bad pockets left unbricked by the new dividend,
into a hundred miners' mouths, forever open.
About those busy with flame, succor, hand to eardrum,
rock folded rock.

Outside in the old sunlight each woman watcher gripped
the concentration of her vacant hands, the desolate summer;
food and hope dear; terror outliving prayer; at last
in the tipple yard these stretchers parallel, where smiles
horror, the acrobat.

"God's devastation," calmly God's minister in pure collar
among the uncomfortable dirty tombs, sanctions 63 dead,
"God's hand and compensation. Moved like David in its heart,
our Co. sends green wreaths to each and $25 scrip.

God's will be done."
Men, O drillers, plowers, workers of the actual ground, we,
our will be done! Our picks must pierce in Washington
the plaster falsehoods. Miners' local, farmers' league

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can, to strangling courthouse or the marble shaky bank, apply
the probe of many bayonets.

Always were we impaled upon the spines of the inhuman seasons.
Headed with frightful feathers, gold-knived, the Aztec
millionaire
slaked heaven with hearts fountaining naked on the elaborate
stone.
Thus now the priests of finance consecrate us naked to
the planet's brutal stone.

From which we rise with bloodied knees, we wide as America.
The rivers are our race. Each corn sprouts from an exploited eye.
Were not of Quetzalcoatl the gross and costly pyramids
split with explosive leaves? Our class already stands,
burning with growth.

On fresh tables can lie flowers and the heavenly grains of the soil.
Yes, from the shining mines propped with our incollapsible
strut of mutual arms, we can, on god-abolishing rails,
condense our power to propel the tremendous irrigation,
the communal Mississippi.

DAVID WOLFF

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EDUCATION OF A TEXAN

Joseph Wilson

YOU SEE, IT ALL STARTED away back when us unemployed in San Anglo was working on a Flood Control project for boxes of groceries. Some of you fellers reading this will remember those days and maybe so some of you are still getting them lousy, wilted carrots. If you are, it's high time you organized and got cash. That's what we did.

The job hadn't started more'n a few days when a young whipper-snapper called Jimmy Gillard started talking union. Now, some of us older heads knowed a little about unions, but blamed if we could see that we could get anywheres on a *relief* job. Besides, we didn't think much of this young squirt because he talked about 'crises' and 'unemployment insurance' and such all, which was a mite over our heads, I reckon. He turned out to be a Communist, and, being's he was the first one we ever saw, we went slow with him and his ideas. We didn't see but what we was lucky to be getting the work, let alone organizing a union and raising all kinds of Hell.

But one day at dinner, after we'd been on the job a couple of weeks, Jimmy came over to eat his snack with some of us old heads. We didn't pay much attention to him and he didn't say anything until somebody started kicking about the water. Then up he spoke.

"Fellers," he said, "How about us getting together and seeing if we can't get some decent water on this job? I'm getting sick and tired of drinking out of a dirty canteen everybody slobbers over!"

Looking back, I can see where Jimmy sure knew his stoff. This water business had sure got our goats. Now, I'm no nasty-nice feller myself, but I hated having my drinking water mixed with somebody elses tobaccy juice all the time.

Old Billy Watkins drowned a fly ten feet away and looked up at the kid. "Well, youngster, what are you going to do? Pipe a fountain up from town and run beer through it for us?"

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We all laughed, but not so much as we might've because we wanted to hear more. Jimmy ignored old Billy.

"Well, maybe we can't do anything, but maybe we can. At least, I'm willing to try. Why not let's elect a committee and demand good water and paper cups? Cups don't cost anything and they're a damn sight cleaner. Any of you willing to go with me?"

We sat there kinda thinking it over and then we got shook up considerable. Big Tex Buckley, sitting beside me, hoisted his carcass off the ground.

"Sure," he said, "I'll go with you, buddy."

We all looked at him. Tex Buckley was pretty well respected by everybody. He was one of the biggest men in size anyone had ever seen and he had a quiet, even tempered manner. He talked less than a dumb man, but he had a good, slow working mind that got places. Tex stood over six-foot-seven and weighed around two-fourty, none of it fat. That gives you some idea of his size, huh?

Well, some more of us decided it wasn't such a bad idea and we let Jimmy lead us around the other gatherings, and, before long, we had a right sizeable bunch rounded up. Then we headed for Mushy Calkins, our foreman.

Now I ain't going to tell you what happened except that we got our water and paper cups, which was what we wanted; and Jimmy Gillard got his Union, which was what he *wanted*. We had a hundred per cent Union gang mighty soon. Big Tex took a leading part even if he didn't ever say anything. He always went on the Committees, and some of us used to say that the bosses gave in because they was more scared of him than the Union. It always tickled me to watch him standing behind Jimmy, who's a half-pint like me, solemnly nodding his head at everything Jimmy said.

We only worked three days a week and Jimmy got us to help him start an unemployment Council downtown. That went over big right from the start, and us fellers in the Union was soon getting groceries and gas and lights and clothes and better conditions for other people. Then we all chipped in and rented a hall and made it the Headquarters of our Union as well as the meeting place of the Council. Jimmy stocked it up with little paper booklets and made us read 'em all. There was sure some new and mighty powerful ideas in them and we soaked it up like West Texas land sops up rain after a drought.

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Then Sam came on to the job. I already told you how big a man Tex was. But shucks man, when Sam took off his shirt that first morning we saw him, we knowed what really big was! No, Sam wasn't so tall as Tex. Wasn't over five-foot-ten anyway. But what that man lacked in height, he sure made up for in width and thickness! He didn't have a neck at all; head just sorta fitted down into his shoulders. His arms was as big as a walking beam and he had hands like hams. His barrel chest must have been three feet thick every which-a-way. And all that was built atop a pair of pile driver legs. He . . . well shoot . . . Sam was just plain BIG!

Sam hadn't been in San Anglo very long and he was the first Negro to work on our gang. He was mighty good natured and he sure could sing. He was black as the ace of spades, but when he smiled, he had the whitest teeth you ever saw that jumped up and said "Howdy!" to you. We liked him fine, and Jimmy was quick to get him into the Union. Sam was a right smart man and he could talk, so he got real active in our work.

Tex and me didn't quite like it when the bunch elected Sam to the Executive Committee, but we never showed it. Seemed that Jimmy was kinda pushing Sam to the front, and anything Jimmy did was right with us. It wasn't that we had anything against Sam himself, it just sorta rubbed something in us the wrong way.

Well, I was already in the Party by this time and Tex was ready to join. One afternoon, Jimmy gave me the address of the Unit meeting and I saw it was to be held at Sam's house. That meant Sam had joined the Party and I went looking for Tex. After I found him, we talked it all over, meaning I talked and Tex agreed, and then we went looking for Jimmy.

I'm not going into details about that confab either, because I guess none of us felt any too good after it was over. You see, both Tex and me was born in West Texas and growed up there. We told Jimmy that we didn't have a thing personal against Sam, and that we didn't object to his joining the Party. Then Jimmy asked us what we were beefing about and I told him Tex and me just figgered it might be better if we stayed out of the Party. Jimmy got mad as blue blazes at first and then he started to argue, but we just didn't jaw with him.

I gave him my Party book and I sure hated to do that. I was mighty proud of that little brown book and those sayings of that Russian feller, Lenin. After we left Jimmy, I kept

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trying to answer Jimmy's arguments to myself, but blamed if I could. I wasn't so dumb I couldn't see that all working men has got more in common with each other than with their bosses of the same color. And I had to admit that working people, fighting amongst one another, was sure sweet pickings for the same bosses. But it seemed like something way down deep in me made me feel the way I did and I couldn't help it.

Well, Tex and me stayed in the Union. Sam knew what had happened and I could tell by the way he acted. One of the boys told us he wanted to leave the Party, but Jimmy wouldn't let him. Sam was real nice to us on the job and us to him. Some of the boys sided with us; some few were against us, but the most didn't side up. Everybody agreed that the Union was big enough for everybody, white, black, yellow or red. More of the gang joined the Party and Tex and me was kinda outsiders after awhile. Sure, everybody treated us fine, but there were things we weren't in on. Jimmy never gave up trying to get us back, but we quit going to the affairs and meetings at the Council after awhile.

Anyway, Sam sure wasn't a bad substitute for me and Tex, I had to hand him that. He went on all the Committees and got almost as good as Jimmy at being Spokesman. The Ku Klux Klan sent him a warning soon after he joined the Party, but Sam just laughed when he told the gang about it on the job.

"Ain't you scared, Sam?" someone asked him.

Sam laughed. "Sure," he said. Sam didn't have no accent like Tex or me, him being born in the North. "Sure, I'm scared. I don't want to be tarred and feathered or rid on a rail." He quit smiling. "But anybody who send me a warning through the mail 'thout no return address is more afraid of me than I am of them. Let 'em try crawling my hump and see what happens!" He bunched those big hands of his and waved 'em around in front of us. We all thought hard about what was likely to happen if those Kluxers did try.

Well, I guess Tex and me would've gone on that way for good if something hadn't happened. Even Jimmy had about given us up when it did. Started when Tex came by my place one Saturday morning looking for Jimmy. Jimmy had just left the house after telling me he was going out of town for a few days. Tex looked worried as all hell when I told him about Jimmy and I asked him what the trouble was.

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"Well, Tom, the wife is in a pretty bad way and I got to get her to the hospital."

I'd known about it of course, but it was news to me that the time was so close. Tex had one curly headed kid about five and now he was getting another one. His wife was a nice little woman and Tex just worshipped her. Told me once he could never get it into his head how come she married a big, awkward lug like himself. So I got my hat and coat while I was thinking about all this. Paula, my wife, was out so I left a note for her to go over and take care of Mrs. Buckley. Walking down the street, I asked Tex if he had applied to the County charity worker for hospital room.

"Sure," he told me. "I went to old lady Ball about a month ago. Now she says there ain't no room at the County Hospital."

Old Ball was the head of the County Relief and she was a regular old . . . well, pardon me, you lady comrades.

"Can't we get a couple of the women and Doc Halper to help and make out at home?" I asked him.

Tex shook his head slow like. "Amy had a powerful bad time with the boy, Tom, and she needs lots of help. Doctors told us then she shouldn't have any more. Tex sounded more miserable than he looked, which was plenty, and I felt right sorry for him.

We got to the Council hall and found a few of the boys. With Jimmy gone, seemed like nobody knowed what to do. Then somebody thought of Sam and went to fetch him. Sam finally came and sure enough, he knew what to do. We rounded up a few fellers and a couple women folks in two old cars and lit out for the hospital on the edge of town. When we got there, we went right into the super's office and he turned us down cold. He was a little bald-headed guy with those pinch-nose glasses and he talked through his nose too. When he'd finished telling us there was no room, Tex took a hand. Reckon it was the first time he'd ever said anything on a Committee.

"But Mister Superintendent, can't you fix up a cot or something for her?"

The super waved his hand like we was a bunch of school kids, and he was teacher dismissing us. "There is no room, my man."

As Tex turned, Sam spoke. "Can't your hospital send some ether equipment down to the house? We can get a doctor."

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It kinda surprised me that Sam would know about things like that and then I remembered he had a couple of kids himself. It was no go anyway.

"Utterly out of the question," the super snapped and that was that. Sam stood there looking at him for a moment.

"We're going," he said. "But we'll be back and maybe you might find room."

Outside on the steps, we held a confab. All of us were wishing Jimmy was there, but he wasn't so we looked to Sam. Maybe Sam wished it too, but he never let on. "Well comrades, we have to get some more people and change this guy's mind for him." Sam turned to Tex. "Got any idea when it'll be?" he asked.

Tex nodded. "Doc Halper says any time in the next three days, but she's getting pretty sick now."

Sam started down the steps. "Let's hustle, gang. Will Doc Halper come on a committee with us?"

"Sure, Sam." I answered. "He'll come."

At the cars, Sam issued orders right and left. We were to separate as soon as we hit town and round up all the people we could find and bring them to the Union hall. I was to get Doc.

Well, it took me a right smart time to find the Doc, and when we got to the hall, it was almost full. Seems like you can get more people riled up over a thing like this than almost anything else. Sam made a little talk explaining the matter, but everybody already knowed and was raring for action. The women was the most burnt up and I reckon that was natural. After Sam finished talking, he called me and Tex aside.

"We have to be careful out there today," he told us. "Might be some trouble."

"Don't agree with you, Sam," I told him. "How in blazes can they start trouble with all these people there?"

"No, the hospital people won't cause any trouble. But you can bet your hat that super called the sheriff the minute we left his office. And you know, Tom, that they're getting pretty worried about the Council, the Union and the Party."

I didn't wait to see what Tex thought. "Why, you're crazy, Sam! I've knowed sheriff Hawkins for fifteen years and he wouldn't pull no rough stuff on us when all we're trying to do is help a woman and her baby!"

Sam shook his head. "Don't be too sure, Tom. Capitalism drives men to worse than baby-killing when their jobs depend

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upon it. Just hold tight and let me do most of the talking. I wish . . . "

He didn't finish, but I knew what he wished. That Jimmy was there. I nodded, and Tex saying nothing, we all piled into the cars that had been drafted and started for the hospital. Doc Halper and my wife was to bring Tex's wife and Tex was to go with them in the Doc's big Buick.

Sam was right about the sheriff. Two of his cars was parked in front of the place when we drew up. We waited until everybody had unloaded and Doc came and then our Committee of Doc, two women, me and Sam, started up the steps. Just then, the doors opened and sheriff Hawkins and six of his deputies came out.

They came down the steps and we waited for 'em. Hawkins walked right past us and up to Tex. The deputies waited a little above.

"Buckley," the sheriff said, "what's all this furore about?"

Before Tex could say anything, Sam busted in. "I'm the spokesman for this Committee, sheriff. We came out here to see that Tex Buckley's wife gets taken care of in the County Hospital here. She's going to have a baby quick and we brought her with us." Sam waved a big arm towards the cars, but he kept looking at the sheriff.

Hawkins hesitated. "But the superintendent has already told you that there was no room."

Sam moved closer. "That don't cut no ice with us, Mister Hawkins. I reckon they'd mighty soon find some room for a rich man's wife, and I reckon they'd could find room for Buckley's wife if they hunted." Sam's face had that same look it had the day out on the job when he told us about the Kluxers, but his voice was quiet and soft.

Anybody could see Hawkins didn't like the way Sam was talking, but it was also plain Hawkins didn't know just what to do. He tried soft soap.

"Now look here boys! I feel the same way you do about this thing. But there isn't any room and that's that. You would get a lot farther if you didn't go around looking for trouble and threatening people. That doesn't do any good." He was talking over Sam's shoulder at us.

Sam cut him short. "We didn't threaten any one, Mister Hawkins. We just told the superintendent we *had* to have room."

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"You did too threaten me, and you know it!" We all turned to see the super standing back of the deputies.

"And you're going to find room," Sam almost shouted the words, but he never turned his head from the sheriff.

"That's enough of that kind of talk!" The sheriff stepped square in front of Sam. "This business is done right here and now!" He glared at the rest of us. "I'll have all you people understand that I'm the Law in this County and what I say goes!" The deputies shifted over directly back of the sheriff. "This hospital is full up and that settles it. The whole bunch of you had better go home before you get into trouble!"

Sam started to say something, but Tex beat him to it. "Mister Hawkins, I don't want any trouble, but I figure that they can make room for my wife in there." Little cold devils started chasing each other up and down my spine. "I'm going to get her and take her in. There won't be any trouble lessen some damn fool tries to stop me!"

He turned down the steps and the sheriff grabbed his arm. "Just a minute, Buckley!" The sheriff's voice was plain panicky.

Tex stopped and Sam moved over beside him. "Well, I'm with him, sheriff!"

Everybody held their breath and there they stood for a spell. Big Tex, without any more expression than a dumb yearling, towered above the sheriff, and Big Sam, his face scowling black as night, blotting the sheriff out of sight with his barn door wide frame. No telling what might've happened if that damn fool super hadn't settled it.

He started to jump up and down with excitement. "You see, sheriff! You see, sheriff! They're going to tell me how to run my hospital and you how to run the law! They're a bunch of communists! They're on relief and can't even make a living, but their women go right on having children like pigs!"

Tex just sorta swung one arm and the sheriff went down like he'd been pole-axed as Tex started for the super. The women screamed as one of the deputies hit Tex a smack with a black-jack that would've dropped an ox. Tex pushed him off and waded into the rest of 'em with blood streaming down his face. He wasn't alone; Sam was right there with him. The super ran into the building hollering bloody murder as the deputies ganged Tex and Sam.

It only lasted a minute, but it takes longer telling. Most of us had lived in San Anglo a long time and we just couldn't

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believe what we were seeing. Maybe that is why we didn't jump in right away. Anyway, there we stood, and there stood Tex and Sam with the deputies buzzing around 'em like flies around a coupla grizzly bears. I'm no writer, so I can't describe it like I want to. But something grabbed my insides real hard seeing those two giants standing there fighting back to back. I couldn't see Tex's face, but Sam had his lips drawn back over his white teeth only they weren't saying "Howdy" this time. All of a sudden, it came over me what that slogan 'Black and White, Unite and Fight' really meant. They'd finished three of those deputies when the rest of us woke up.

We rushed in and grabbed the others and held them. Then we had to grab Tex as he dove for the building. It was like trying to stop a elephant, but somehow we did it. We only brought him to when we shouted about his wife. He sure wanted that super bad, and me, for one, was always sorry he didn't get the son.

Well, it was pretty much a stand-off then and Doc got Tex's wife into the place. We let the deputies go after taking their guns, and then we started bringing the sheriff to. Tex and Sam was both cut bad as those leather-strip saps make a wicked, jagged tear in a man's head. Doc came back out and had just taken them inside to get fixed up when the City Police came raring up. There was three loads of 'em and a fire wagon, so help me! It was so damn funny we all busted out laughing. everything was all settled by that time anyway because the nurses had found room for Mrs. Buckley. The super had beat it out the back way and even the news reporters couldn't find him for two days.

It all finally got caught up when Nate Brown, the Chief of Police, arrested Sam and Tex on charges of Assault and Battery, Resisting Arrest, Rioting and a few other things. The sheriff wasn't in any condition to arrest anybody. Some of us kinda grumbled, but it was like Doc Halper pointed out; we couldn't fight the whole San Arvin police force. He told us that when the truth got out, they'd never be able to convince either of 'em and he was right. We bailed 'em out that night, and before the trial, Jimmy wrote a swell leaflet and we sure plastered the town with it. Even some church women and business men's wives sided up with us. Sure enough, the case was dismissed without being brought to trial.

All in all, the whole thing was mighty good for the move-

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ment in San Anglo and we gained a lot in experience. Best thing was, Tex got educated and he sure ain't one of these chauvinists any more. Sam's got a mighty nice wife and two of the cutest little kinky-headed kids you ever laid eyes on. You can find Tex over at Sam's house right often playing checkers or pinochle with Sam. Sometimes, it's a three-handed game because I'm there.

POEM

What does it matter: that groupings
Of men venture reason into the crying,
—good god, what does it matter—
That alleys rot with weeping; that men
Are ripe for dying; are learned in killing—
What does it matter. Let us
Gravely poison every pool where
Plato drank; upend the words,
'love' 'heart' 'love' heart'.
Let us dream with the heavy artillery
Stopping the lovely mouth
Of this generation; let us dream
While shells pour paradise
Into the bowels of these young men.

Let us say with Wordsworth; let us say
With Herrick, Isaac Watts and Hunt:

Say we were weary, say we were cheated,
Say we fell like sheep and bleated;
Say life went over, missing us—
But add, we died content,
With Big Berthas kissing us.

—KENNETH PATCHEN

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BOOKS

A SPECTER HAUNTS MR. KRUTCH

WAS EUROPE A SUCCESS? *by Joseph Wood Krutch. Farrar & Rinehart, Inc.* $1.00.

It would appear from this book, an augmented series of essays first published in *The Nation,* that Mr. Krutch has been extremely harrassed lately by finding himself surrounded by communists and communist ideas. At every point, Mr. Krutch has felt the contaminating touch of communist theory, until his soul has been filled with a gruesome fantasy of communism that will not let him sleep; though it is hard to say that if he could visualise the actual features of communism it would disturb him less. Incidentally, his book, a blow struck against "the spectre haunting Europe," proves once more that serious criticism of communist thought is to be found only in communist literature.

Mr. Krutch sees communist society as a Utopian dream conceived by a 19th century economist named Marx; to him it is a night-product of the Marxian personality against which Mr. Krutch, knowing little of economics or history, has the duty of defending his own spirit. Now this Communist Society of Mr. Krutch's Marx, being the cold structure of a rationalist, all formulated in advance and outside of history, promises to be inhabited by monstrous automata motivated by standardized mass-reflexes and kept in subjection by a fanatical dictatorship whose sole aim is to produce higher and higher factory-records. This image, in connection with which all Mr. Krutch's arguments must be considered, recalls to his horrified mind such things as medieval catholicism, Puritan morality, The Society of Jesus, The Grand Inquisitor, a bee-hive, the Third Reich, in fact anything associated with an abstract, inhuman, and rigid pattern of existence. If by some unhappy miracle, the nightmare continues, this impossible, dead thing should come into existence, gone would be art, philosophy, rhetoric, urbanity, and all the subtle delicacies of human relationships which make life worth living; gone would be "the European heritage" of "individuality, freedom, and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge"; vanished would be the "European" man whom it has required centuries of human effort to develop—his place would be taken by a new creature, who, whatever his virtues, would be a regrettable novelty, because he would be a communist, that is, one who can neither think nor feel.

To correct people who hold such a notion of communism, it is not enough to respond to particular objections. One must go back to the very beginning and explain, with appropriate patience, that Krutch's image of communist society and the contradictions suggested by such an image could only exist in the mind of a non-communist; that Marxist-Leninist communism, since it rests upon the reality of historical development, anticipates, not some formulated social life "prophesied" in advance of the event by Marx, Lenin or anyone else, but a society built by the working

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masses according to their needs in future historical epochs, the prerequisite for this social self-expression of the masses being their liberation by the dictatorship of the proletariat. The dilemma of the utopianists—if the society of the future already exists as a concept, how will the people of the future accomodate themselves to it without being mechanized; if it does not exist as a concept, how can one judge that it will be superior to present society?—a dilemma which Mr. Krutch, because he cannot comprehend the historical reality of class struggle, vainly strives to pin upon communism, is dissolved by the Marxist dialectic and its conception of the creative historical rôle of the masses.

Marxism makes it possible to gauge the potentialities of the future because it provides the means for analyzing the formations of the past. But owing to his inability to think in terms of historical actuality, Mr. Krutch's notion of Europe's past, its "heritage," is as vacant and misguided as his notion of communism. "Individuality," "freedom," and "disinterested speculation" (the "disinterested" is, of course, dubious), the heritage which he claims to defend, have been different things in different historical epochs. They seem to have no place in communist society because for Mr. Krutch's intellectual epoch the word individuality actually means the self-fascination of personality and the nurturing of the unreal ego of the sentimental pragmatists; freedom means the liberty to inherit, travel, and "live dangerously" a career of sensation; and disinterested speculation means, not scientific accuracy and necessity, or even speculation apart from propagandist aims, but detachment for its own sake, the privilege of being a voluptuous taster of spiritual commodities secure from the partisanships of life and without responsibility. So that the individuality, freedom and speculation of Mr. Krutch's epoch can have no place in communism.

Communism exposes the degeneracy of bourgeois conceptions of individuality, freedom and knowledge. It displays the actual content of these terms in the present epoch. It proposes to make a realistic redefinition of these values in accord with social fact and scientific possibility.

But why, in view of the particular forms of individuality, freedom and knowledge which he has in mind, does Mr. Krutch elect to call them "European" values? They would be "European" only if they had always existed in and been characteristic of European life; but he himself, though he tries to see them floating over the whole history of Europe, is forced to state that they were "at times obscured by opposite tendencies, and certain of them—notably those which relate to individual freedom and the high valuation put upon what is called personality—hardly manifested themselves very strongly before the Renaissance." And the fact is that these values of the bourgeois individualist, to whom "differentiation and variety" are "desidable in themselves," scarcely antecede the anti-social and animistic ideals of the 19th century; in the middle ages, when freedom was considered as synonymous with reason, individuality had to with a discipline of the metaphysical soul; in antiquity, the individuality of a man seems to have consisted largely of Name and Reputation, an eidolon resulting from the social quality of his deeds. Apparently then, it is not of free, speculative individuality in its European context that Mr. Krutch is thinking, but of 19th century personality which arises from and depends upon the bourgeois social structure; he is not analyzing the history of

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Europe in order to determine what have been its contributions to humanity. Why then "European"? Why not "American," or "humanistic," or "liberal," or anything else than European?

The term "European" is chosen by Mr. Krutch as a counter-idea to communism for the same reason, though with perhaps less conscious intent that it is used by Spengler and other doctors of fascism, in order, that is, to set the U.S.S.R., the exploited colonial civilizations, and the whole movement of the proletariat and poor peasants of Europe and America, outside the boundaries of civilization; to be non-European is to be outside the concerns of European and American justice and progress. Thus, under the mystical claims of a European Style, he seeks to isolate European and American thought from the whole history of human values, and so to cover the depredations of one element of humanity as the expense of all others:

> "But humanity as Europe knows it cannot be imagined apart from the social order which Europe has created. . . . "

No cultured European, thinks Mr. Krutch, will lay hands upon the present European social order and risk the loss of freedom, individuality, and contact with knowledge merely for the sake of "non-European" barbarians to whom these things are nothing.

The real inheritors of European culture are not, however, these "cultured Europeans" whose sole rôle is to attempt to defend their crumbling values at any cost to humanity. If Mr. Krutch wishes to learn into whose hands European culture has actually entrusted its life, let him read the address of Lenin to the 3rd Congress of the Communist Youth:

> "It would be a serious mistake to suppose that one can become a communist without making one's own the treasures of human knowledge. . . .
>
> Communism becomes an empty phrase, a mere facade, and the communist a mere bluffer, if he has not worked over in his consciusness the whole inheritance of human knowledge."

If, on the other hand, he wishes to learn who are the automatons of abstraction, not in some remote Utopia but today in this living, critical epoch of man's history, let him meditate upon his own definitions of individuality, freedom and disinterested speculation, his "European heritage," and then read the works of the man who in the desperate first days of revolutionary conquest urged the Russian youth to acquire communism

> "in such a way that communism will not be something learned by heart, but something which you have thought out yourselves, something which forms the inevitable conclusion from the point of view of modern education."

That communists are not as culturally dislocated as he imagined, should reassure Mr. Krutch as to the prospects of European civilization, or perhaps, as the representative of a class, it should alarm him still more.

HAROLD ROSENBERG

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EASTMAN'S PURISM

ART AND THE LIFE OF ACTION, *by Max Eastman. Alfred A. Knopf.* $2.00.

This book is a collection of speeches, reviews and travel sketches, prefaced by the eighty page essay which gives it its title. The essay is, in substance, a restatement or summary of the views expressed in *The Literary Mind* and *Artists in Uniform* and really depends on the more detailed considerations to be found in those books. It is given the form, however, of a brief history of the "sanctions" by which men have attempted to justify art—sanctions of craftsmanship, magic, religion, morality, education and politics. These justifications, we are to believe, have been successively less valid interpretations of the nature of art, and the Marxian interpretation, of course, is the most sadly erroneous of them all.

It is not my purpose in this brief review to discuss Eastman's theories of "social engineering." Since his literary doctrine is, however, inseparable from them, it may be well to give the gist of his frequent attacks on Marxism before I attempt to deal with his central critical thesis. Marxism for Eastman is not scientific but medieval, "an animistic scheme taken over from Hegel's religious philosophy, for convincing the believer that the universe is on his side." The Marxist conceives the revolutionist as taking a conscious, willful and necessary part in a historical process determined by productive forces and class struggles. In this process culture is one of the interacting elements. The Eastman revolutionist dismisses this as poppycock, decides what kind of a state he wants, and sets about building it on the most objective and scientific principles.

What has the artist to do with this "purposive enterprise?" Nothing. As far as his art is concerned, he keeps out of it. "A splitting away of art from purposive enterprise, and from that understanding of factual relations upon which such enterprise must rest, is what really characterizes our age." The scientist, Eastman says, conceives the relation between facts, and his work has a direct and continual relation to activity; the poet perceives facts in their "qualities." His work is to heighten consciousness, and has actually an inhibiting effect upon action. It is suggested that there is a direct causal relation between arrested action and aroused consciousness.

As a simple example of this Eastman offers a beautifully wrought drinking cup. If it is artistic, the man who holds it will stop drinking to regard it. Literature, he says, moving us to the contemplation of "sheer experience," is completely separate from any idea of purpose. But I think we can assume that the appreciative cup holder goes on to finish his drink, and even that eye and palate support each other. And I cannot believe that man, for all his variousness, is so compartmented that although a heightened consciousness, "sheer experience" will influence his behaviour when they have other sources, they will not do so when their source is art. Obviously in some circumstances one cannot indulge in contemplation and act effectively at the same time, but that is not the question.

But even if art can influence behaviour as more direct forms of experience do, can we expect that the artist should give more than the

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"quality" of his material, can we demand that he attempt to "organize" the reader's response in the direction of a certain kind of action? I do not think it is possible for the author to control completely the responses of the reader except in forms of writing so insular, so limited in reference that almost no associations can develop in the reader's mind irrelevant to the purpose of the work. This is true of many mystery stories, adventures, fantasies, tales of science and experiments with trick plots. I do not mean that as phenomena they lack social significance, but that once you are launched in the reading of one, your response is pretty well anticipated, and as a social attitude very insignificant.

Very similar in effect is the literature of pathos. Eastman speaks of the fact that Lenin "wept at Sarah Bernhardt's acting of the Lady of the Camelias." I think a person could be a good Marxist and still find his eyes misting at certain scenes in the movie of *David Copperfield* or *Little Women.* But this is precisely, as H. W. Garrod once pointed out, because it is such bad art. You weep at *East Lynne,* he said, but not at *Lear.* The meaningless and anguished death of a lovely woman throws out its little beam of sympathy like the filament in a vacuum tube, and for a similar reason. But as soon as a death becomes significant, as soon as there is tragedy, the response is very different; attitude is affected, and action.

Consider, for instance, the deaths in *Man's Fate* by Malraux. I think that is a greater book than *Little Women;* I do not think it inhibits action although it does increase consciousness; I do not think it could have been written of the partisans of Chiang Kai-shek. And in this judgment one is not merely approving propaganda for the right side. Indeed, *Man's Fate* has all the qualitative appreciation of "sheer" experience that Eastman demands, but the novel does prepare the reader for action because it increases in him the consciousness of the values and necessities that Malraux has felt in the struggle he describes. The effect might be compared to the flow of water from the upper level into canal lock, lifting a steamer so that it can continue on its way.

But what of a writer like Proust, whose social attitude is passive, whose social standards are of the *haute bourgeoisie,* and who is interested only in the æsthetic quality of his experience? I wonder if it is an honest account of our experience in reading him to say that his only or even chief virtue is his describing social decay. This invokes unnecessarily, I think, what Eastman calls the Educative Sanction. Proust himself says that art "is the revelation—impossible by direct and conscious means—of the qualitative difference in the way the world appears to us, differences which, but for art, would remain the eternal secret of each of us." Art is much more than that, but to the extent that we are able to put ourselves imaginatively into Proust's world—and that will become increasingly more difficult—we respond to his observations with a mingled surprise and recognition that extends more or less permanently our boundaries of perception in all kinds of experience. And since the Marxist is not guilty of Eastman's dichotomy, since he knows that the individual consciousness is an integral part of the historic process, the work of Proust does not seem unrelated to the preparation for action.

But I. A. Richards and others have said that the artist strives so to

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order his experience that the reader will have the same response to it that he had. In giving ourselves up imaginatively to a writer like Proust, then, are we laying the basis for a counter-revolutionary "adjustment of attitude?" Proust's response to his experience was to try to find the underlying reality of it in a work of art which explored all its associations and sentiments. He regarded himself only as translator, or at times as a Newton or Einstein of the inner cosmos. Richards' definition does not hold in this case. Nor is our response "irrelevant to the class struggle"—one of Eastman's few references to that conflict. Not only do we observe the decadence of the life described, but we are even more aware of the plain fact of Proust's own being, of the social premises of his neurosis, the paralysis of action, the elephantiasis of self. But most important as direct literary response is the overwhelming consciousness that this is a terminal point, the end of one line of development, that only when the whole set-up of which this work is a part is removed, can cultural life go on.

There must be very little conscious falsification of experience in Proust or Joyce. But in pursuit of intensity such writers are forced to follow a logic of development consistent with their social attitude and class position, which leads to greater and greater tenuousness and irrelevance, toward the intelligent meaninglessness (for us) of Sidney's *Arcadia* or Calvinist theology. The pressure of class conflict makes it constantly more difficult for writers who have not broken with the bourgeoisie to keep on this narrow road, and they leave it. So when we come in Eliot's *The Rock,* Pound's *Cantos,* MacLeish's *Frescoes,* to factitious appeals to prejudice and hope, to solutions that are no solutions, to the desertion of integrity and experience, and when we compare these with the grounds on which proletarian writers are building, I think a sufficiently clear picture of these things is formed so that nothing Max Eastman has said so far about the necessary complete separation of art from ideas and action and classes can very much disturb it.

OBED BROOKS

TIME AND THOMAS WOLFE

OF TIME AND THE RIVER, *by Thomas Wolfe. Scribners.* $3.00.

All the things that were said about *Look Homeward, Angel* can be said about this new novel by the stone-cutter's son. You remember: an immense power of description, an unbridled torrent of primitive emotion in the contemplation of the natural acts of men, a feeling for the land that is as beautiful and overwhelming as the great nights of the autumn, an elemental honest sensuousness, a fine humility in the face of the incalculable mysteries of art and song, a lust for understanding, for strength, for freedom; and also huge tracts of lush and empty verbiage, a pervasive absence of intellectual discipline, a tendency to symbolize and to exaggerate

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the significance of trivialities, a strange and frightening ego-centrism that at times verges on the psychopathic.

You may say that we are fortunate in this barren year to have something like *Of Time and the River* to read if, with all its faults, it is yet as good and as rich as *Look Homeward, Angel.* Perhaps. There is this to consider: *Look Homeward, Angel* was a first novel; it central figure was an adolescent. Because of the first fact we forgave its sprawling shapelessness and because of the second we sympathized with its inchoate day-dreaming and its absorption in its own flow of emotion and experience. But *Of Time and the River* is a second novel; it appears five years after the other; its central character is now a young man living, studying, and working in Boston, New York, England, and France; and its *author is five years older* (and God what years they have been). And so you cannot help saying to yourself as you go through the 900 pages of this novel, "So he has not changed? He has not grown older? He has no learned yet how to control himself and his pen? He still takes himself so seriously?" And when you have said these things, you have in effect said that Thomas Wolfe by staying in the same place has gone backwards.

Of Time and the River is a "legend of man's hunger in his youth." There cannot be the slightest doubt that it is largely autobiographical. Its hero, Eugene Gant, is a North Carolinian, the son of an old stone-cutter, who swept triumphantly through the state university and now, at twenty, goes to Harvard to study dramaturgy. Two years of that, and he returns to his home to watch his father die of cancer, to write, to drink wildly, and to feel himself rot with inertia and disgust. He goes to New York to teach in a college peopled chiefly with middle-class Jews, leaves that to go to Oxford to write, then packs up for a long carousal in Paris, followed by a season of aimless, painful wandering over the whole of France, and finally comes back to America.

That is the barest, least descriptive of outlines. It tells nothing of the enormous diversity of scene and experience. A modest cottage in a Southern town, a jail, a classroom, a shabby-genteel hotel, a magnificent chateau on the Hudson, a room in the Village, a castle in France, a barroom, a cafe on the boulevard, a railroad station, a whore-house, and restaurants of all kinds, sizes, and qualities—these are the places through which young Gant races passionately in his endless unrequited search for peace and completion. Nor does it tell anything of the tragedies of friendship and love, of the sorrow in the death of his brother that will never leave him, of the horror and joy of his home, of the bawdy comedy that lies in the vanities and pretentions of the strutting male.

What is the whip that brings blood to his eyes? He writes: "What is it that we Americans are seeking always on this earth?" "Where shall I go now? What shall I do?" "A place of certitude and peace and wandering no more." In a recent interview he said: "The general plan back of these books is the story of a man's looking for his father. Everybody in the world—not only men but women—is looking for a father. Looking for some person of superior strength. Some person outside of themselves to whom they can attach their belief."

Put those statements beside this: that in the same interview he "cried out vehemently that he was 'born of working people.'" And also this:

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that in his book always he makes clear his sense of oneness with those who toil with their hands and that again and again he climbs frantically onto the laps of the rulers and the rich only to be ultimately repelled by their coldness and thinness and their remoteness from the realities that make this land so cruelly and terribly lovely to him.

It is easy, and doubtless justifiable within limits, to apply the psychoanalytic thesis to Wolfe's hunger and frustration. Much that is fruitful and enlightening would be discovered thereby. But it would not be the whole story. It would not be the last and most important chapter of the story. There is something else: the world today, this country today, and the place of the artist in it. It is unnecessary, here, to point the moral. Can't Wolfe see it? Doesn't he realize where his wanderings must lead him if he is to find the strength that will give him certitude? Isn't he aware that he must stay with the masses who gave birth to him and fed him and not seek to escape into a corrupt and alien atmosphere and that his own struggle must be translated into the common struggle for a world in which viciousness and defeat are accidents and not inherent in the fabric? Is he attempting to evade it? Doesn't he see that if he goes to his "father" he will be enabled to resolve the personal and secret conflicts that lure him back to the father of his flesh and that confuse and hurt him? If he doesn't, he will never grow up, never get the discipline that he needs above all else, never heal, never get outside himself—because he is an artist and cannot become "sophisticated." He will continue to wallow in his adolescent phantasies and to weave wonder and magic around the dry and the obvious. He will go on like a schoolgirl weeping over meaningless little tragedies. He will go on looking at men and women and seeing gods and devils and the winds of chance, instead of men and women.

BERNARD SMITH

SYMBOLS OF SURVIVAL

CHORUS FOR SURVIVAL, *by Horace Gregory. Covici Friede.* $2.00.

There can be no question, I believe, that Horace Gregory's talent is one of the most original and intense to be found anywhere in 20th century literature, and I believe a thorough objectivity has been the peculiar essence of this talent, an objectivity in which the author does not hover "above" his material in that fake detachment that is today so well exposed, but in which he projects himself into people and events, to speak from within them in their own convincing accents, their own terms, the rhythms of their particular lives. As Edgar Lee Masters, for example, described the inhabitants of Spoon River, but always in the same key and tempo, Gregory went far beyond him by presenting—not describing but actually presenting —men, women, and situations in language that adapted itself to the essential characteristics of each.

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Of course, all literature has had to deal with precisely this problem, and of course, it is impossible—even if it were desirable—for any writer to achieve absolute identification with each of many, and vastly different, lives drawn from outside himself. That is, in every presentation the author's personality remains, as an invisible center of a visible circle. But there is, at any rate, the illusion of objectivity, the indispensable illusion, that which convinces the reader he is no longer reading words, and those the words of a single man, but is actually undergoing experiences, and—at its best—is, through these experiences, living the lives of many men. And Gregory has contributed much, has greatly broadened, the perspectives and possible reaches of this objectivity.

In *Chorus For Survival,* however,—Gregory's third volume of poetry —there is a considerable weakening of his grip upon the external world. Without his previous *No Retreat,* and particularly the earliest volume, *Chelsea Rooming House,* this present "series of episodic poems all written within the last two years and all relevant to a single theme indicated by the title" would still be distinguished poetry, but much of the firmness that marked his previous work is missing. The balance formerly preserved between Gregory and those of whom, and through whom, he has sought to speak, has here become insecure, the dividing line is blurred. In short all the voices in *Chorus For Survival* have now become one voice, Gregory's, and, what is more regrettable, it is the author in a single—almost favorite—mood. The reiterated note is this:

Let me survive,
outlive the syllables that sound my name,
being alive
down corridors of steel,

avoiding death, the brief, post mortem fame,
the empty wreath closed with an iron seal,
the secret locked, the word unsaid,
body at rest among unfriendly dead.

Being alive, and through disquiet, smiling,
let me survive, naked in light, this room my cell;
learn bitterly to know myself too well,
till the self-flowering tree
that bears man's destiny
hangs withered fruit across the garden wall.

See the world break in me
flood, war and hurricane
enter the narrow rivers of the brain,
break and subside
in darkness flowing with the warm blood-tide
until I wake, ageless, the limbs walk free,—
open my heart to meet my love again.

The wish is legitimate, and moving, but when it is too often repeated it no longer carries conviction, begins, in fact, to lose its very meaning.

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And as an example of what happens to Gregory's larger symbol—personal survival—as it is reiterated in all its variations, certain minor symbols, specific images, also too often repeated, lose their freshness, lose finally all significance. "Darkness" and "bitter" are two words, to select the chief offenders, that may be found on nearly every page of these poems and, abstractions to begin with, by such frequent use their meaning crumbles into a darkness that is dark indeed. "Bitter the thinking man who sees the careful millionaire. . . . " "The bitter hours into seasons pass . . . " "The dying echoes of a bitter year . . . " "Wake with thy song, time-darkened waters . . " "hands, lips, and eyes in love, in darkness burn . . ." "O my America, in me discover thy face in darkness. . . . "

But this malady, which also attacks Gregory's historical and literary references, goes deeper than a simple matter of craftsmanship, is really, of course, the author's own malady. Emotional uncertainty, emotional confusion, are names I believe applicable to it, emotional collisions that occur within him whenever he considers the society of today and, more specifically, feels wrapped in the growing heat of class war. For Gregory has, in this poem and on many other occasions, declared and shown himself in complete accord with the Communist analysis of society and its program. But, in spite of this intellectual certainty, his emotions remain divided, even though, as is likely, he is well aware—again intellectually—of this fact. Yet it is necessary to come to grips with every confusion, it is impossible to dwell upon, to exploit, these doubts however inevitable they are, inane to linger too long and—as Gregory does here—a bit too lovingly above the grave of the system which is, spiritually at least, thoroughly deceased. What, after all, was the corpse—a friend, or an enemy?

KENNETH FEARING

ARAGON AS A NOVELIST

LES CLOCHES DE BALE, *par Louis Aragon... Paris. Denoël et Steele.* 1934.

In his latest novel, Louis Aragon has done at least four outstanding things.

In the first place, he has given us a devastatingly mordant picture—such a one, it may be, as only he was in a position to paint—of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century society and the self-destructive forces in that society, down to 1912 (the date of the International Socialist Congress at Basle), or about two years before the World War. It is a picture that graphically and movingly explains the French bourgeois civilization of today, a civilization which, coming down from Dreyfus to Stavisky, made possible the events of the Sixth of February, 1934. (One is not sure, indeed, that the Sixth of February—the *"jour de février"*—has not been Aragon's emotional starting-point here). In any event, *Les cloches de Bâle* is the all-sufficing answer to the old boys who would tell us that "the foundations then were at least solid," etc., etc. This latter

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is the position of Duhamel, for example, in his latest sentimental series, of the painter-novelist, Maurice Vlaminck, in his *La Haute-Folie* of last year, as of M. Paul Bourget, when, a good part of a century ago, he exclaimed, *"Ah! la brave classe moyenne, la solide at vaillante bourgeoisie que possède encore la France!"* And has not Count Carlo Sforza said something as to the ability of the bourgeoisie to defend itself? If you want to see just how *"solide"* and how *"vaillante"* that same bourgeoisie was in France, for some twenty or thirty years preceding the War, read *Les cloches de Bâle.* Aragon shows, by a terrible sledgehammer piling up of fact on fact, set off at times by a biting irony in every line, how hopelessly rotting the system, all society, was in those days, how inextricably interlaced the gangrene was, and how nothing could come out of it but catastrophe.

In this respect, and the point is to be stressed, Aragon's book is the real article, of which such a work as Romains' *Men of Good Will* is but a shoddy imitation. It is, so far as this reviewer is aware, alone in its field.

A second thing which the author has done is to portray for us three significant types of women, the woman of the day before yesterday, of yesterday and of tomorrow. His Diane is what might be described as the respectable whore type, of the *fin du siècle* and early century. His Catherine may be termed "the whore's daughter," rebellious, would-be-decent, but for all of that, still *economically* a kept woman, with longings that must remain futile for a social reality vaguely represented to her by the working class—the best she can do is to flounder and flirt with anarchism. And finally, there is the woman of the future, typified for the author by Clara Zetkin, who led to the founding of the Communist Party in France, and to whom he devotes an ecstatic non-narrative epilogue.

Aragon's third accomplishment is bound up with his portrayal of Catherine, or the transitional-type woman. A bit hard to put into words, it has to do with the description, and above all, with the delimitation of the true proletarian-revolutionary consciousness, the silly ineffectualness, for instance, of a movement such as anarchism being shown up for all time, with all proletarian defeatism nipped in the bud. Read the chauffeur Victor's declamation against suicide as working class treason, and then remember that Louis Aragon once took part in a Surerealist *enquête* on the subject, *"Le suicide, est-il une solution?"* He has gone far since then!

Yet another contribution which this novel has to make is a long, vivid and stirring description of the great 144-days Parisian chauffeurs' strike of 1911-12, which is still labor history. Here, Aragon distinctly shows that, while coming himself from the upper bourgeoisie, he can handle proletarian material. On the whole, however, while far more slashing and venomous, *Les cloches de Bâle* is rather to be compared to such a work as *The Executioner Waits.* There is lacking entirely the mannered hardboildness of many of our young proletarian writers. The book is written in Aragon's own superb prose, in an idiom enriched by slang and common speech; but there is no faintest trace of modernistic posture; it is revolutionary realism of the highest quality.

SAMUEL PUTNAM

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STRUGGLE IN AFRICA

IN A PROVINCE, *by Laurens Van Der Post. Coward-McCann,* $2.50.

In A Province is a first novel by a young Dutch South African. Greeted by English literary critics with salvos of acclaim this initial work by Laurens Van Der Post has been almost unanimously neglected by American reviewers. Though less clear in its revolutionary pronouncements than either Malraux's *Man's Fate* or Silone's *Fontamara,* it is yet a worthy contribution to the young, virile body of literature of revolution which is progressively developing throughout the entire world today.

The youth and early manhood of Johan van Bredepoel, an orphan, around whom and through whose consciousness the entire movement of the novel takes place, are spent at Vergelegen, in the African farm country with Mynheer Willem van Bredepoel and Tante Margrieta. Johan's aunt and uncle who emigrated from Holland as young people after a considerable decline in the fortune and position of their family attempted to establish themselves in the barbarian country of great promise; for a short time they were successful, but after the War (the Boer War, undoubtedly, though it is never specifically mentioned by that name) the whole effort of reconstruction exhausted them: the farm was neglected and the elder van Bredepoel entered politics. If anything went wrong, the War was blamed; "the war seemed to have cut roughly through their psychological development, at the same time sealing it arbitrarily . . . the rhythm of their lives, in the fullest sense of the word, had been broken, and they were incapable of taking it up again. At the same time Johan noticed in himself and in other boys that the parent generation had conveyed to all of them its own special sense of discord—a discord which had its roots not in the lives of the children but in a life long since gone. And because this discord persisted long after the circumstances which had created it, it was the source of much confusion, and gave the lives of people like Johan an emotional content which they could not properly possess. But what the lives of the elders lacked in breadth they made up for in faith: a vigorous Dutch Protestant morality.

Young Bredepoel's education was haphazard, and when his guardians were away from home (as they were wont to be most of the time) he was left with native servants or a tutor. Meneer Broeksma, a Pangloss-like instructor, sceptical and with acid disposition, threw Johan back on himself . . . "he was gradually driven to seek companionship in books rather than in people. No control was exercised over his reading, so that presently, although interested in many points of view, he found he had none that he could strictly call his own; between his knowledge and his experience there was a very wide gap." This deep-rooted hiatus existed throughout the span of Johan's entire life, first in Vergelegen, later in Port Benjamin, a coastal city where he was employed as a clerk, and finally in Paulsted on the border of Bambuland,—and was the cause of his varied quixotic activities.

The theme of the book as a whole is the irreconcilable conflict between bourgeois society and the individual. In one sense the book is an indictment of bouregois society (its descriptions and analyses of life on an

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Empire territory are amongst the most devastating I have read), in another and larger sense the book deals with the inevitable strife between organized living of any kind and the anarchic enchantment of the sensitive young man who thinks he wants to mind his own business and wishes other people would do the same. But not only is van Bredepoel not permitted to remain passive to his existence, not only is he forbidden to live outside of time in a genteel vacuum, as it were, but he becomes so inextricably caught up in the maelstrom of revelations which his sensitiveness to life arouses, that in the end, when he cannot reconcile himself to revolutionary struggle, and substitutes a naive, simplistic Christianity instead, he dies, a victim to his own caprice.

Mr. Van Der Post has written a dialectical novel in a dual sense. Not only does he bring into sharp relief the class conflicts between the white farmers, the small land-owners and the imperialist government, the black slaves and their prejudice-ridden masters, but in the older Greek sense of dialectics, which consists of a conversation between two people with opposing points of view, the personalities of Johan, the peace-loving Christian, and Burgess, who came from a family of English Socialists among the first to accept the doctrine of Marx, become an arena in which a number of different points of view have battle with each other. The result is a kind of review lecture on the major ideas for and against revolutionary activity, granted existing evils. All of the ideas which pass between van Bredepoel and Burgess are personified and the actors who personify them (both Burgess and van Bredepoel are the main actors in the life conflict of their discussion) engage in dramatic conflict with one another.

The tragedy of Johan is that he dies. Possibly Mr| Van Der Post means that Johan, the righteous Christian, like Jesus who placed all the responsibility for his riches and their renunciation on the rich man himself, is destined to die in modern society. Like Hans, the man who questions society and continues to live while Joachim, the conformist dies in *The Magic Mountain,* so Burgess, the revolutionist, the man who organizes the black slaves to fight against degenerate imperialism, lives at the close of *In A Province.*

Laurens Van Der Post displays in this first novel a delicate equipoise between the thinker and the artist, the man of intelligence and the man of sensibility, which seems to be necessary for all vital men in literature. His sense of tragedy and over-sympathetic treatment of Johan to the exclusion of many other characters, and his excessive use of understatement in describing Burgess does not necessarily lead to any corrosive attitude towards life itself. Despite Johan's confusion and the seeds of terrible hate which people like Burgess still sow out of their love of the oppressed, despite his recognition of all that, Mr. Van Der Post illustrates a strong sympathy and understanding of the forward moving forces of life.

ERIC ESTORICK

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PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A CHILD

CALL IT SLEEP, *by Henry Roth. Robert Ballou, New York,* 599 pp. $2.50.

During the past few years the American reading public has been presented with steadily increasing literature stemming from Jewish-American sources. A new generation of writers has arisen, educated in American schools, influenced by urban and cosmopolitan civilization, articulating the life of the first American generation; chronicling the terror and wonder of the child who must face not only a strange world, but find himself alien to his parents' traditions as well.

This writer is in an anomalous position. On the one hand his life has been life in a medieval world with medieval values. His parents have transplanted their culture from the Russian, Polish and Galician ghettos. On the other hand the author has been a student of the best in modern literature; he has read Joyce and Proust, he is familiar with Symbolist literature, he is no stranger to Marxist philosophy and practice. Catapulted from the eleventh century into the twentieth; this has been the painful predicament his generation has faced. It is also the fertile soil from which his fresh work springs. There is an added element. Sons of immigrants ten years ago, still had a chance to climb out of their class. The sons today remain sons of the proletariat.

Mike Gold and Samuel Ornitz wrote the outstanding books of an earlier group. Their work created an exotic aura about the ghetto. It stemmed from the muckracker literature of the Dreiser era and viewed their life as romantic color material for fiction.

Essentially the experience of the earlier as well as of the more recent writers is similar, but, new methods and influences in literature have made the recent work more mature, dealing more skillfully and profoundly with life.

Call It Sleep by Henry Roth is the latest work produced in this group. It is also the most finished work of art. Henry Roth's book is conceived in intense poetic and psychological terms and is written in a rare and distinguished manner. At times he is guilty of overwriting, but these moments are few. The book for the most part is documented with acute and sensitive details of tenement life. It is remarkable for its understanding of child psychology and relationships and its transcription of the gutter language of slum children. Roth has enricher the American language by recording accurately this Anglicized jargon of the ghetto.

The novel is the story of a child of six years. It is conceived in four symbols—The Cellar, The Picture, The Coal and The Rail. Though the conception of the author remains partially obscure, in creating these symbols certain Freudian implications are apparent. The Cellar represents the terror of the six-year old child making his first contacts with the world beyond his home. The Picture introduces a haunting leit-motif into the story. It projects the mother's past and David's dim awareness of a hidden and secret motivation for his terrifying life. The Coal re-

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introduces the theme of terror, this time sustained on a newer and higher note. Drawing its image from a biblical passage, The Coal symbolizes for the child David, the unknown darkness become power, strength and God, unknowable and all-powerful. The device of The Rail reveals David invoking God, the power of darkness, as he draws electric fire from the matrix of a trolley tracks' third rail. The atavistic behaviour of a child from six to nine years of age, recapitulates in a modern urban environment, the savage's fears in the face of nature. This time the symbols are contemporary, but the experience remains universal.

Call It Sleep is more than the best novel of Jewish-American life to appear up to the present time. This first novel by Henry Roth can easily take its place as one of the most outstanding books of the past ten years. *Call It Sleep* is the most promising first novel since Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.*

JOSEPH WOLF

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